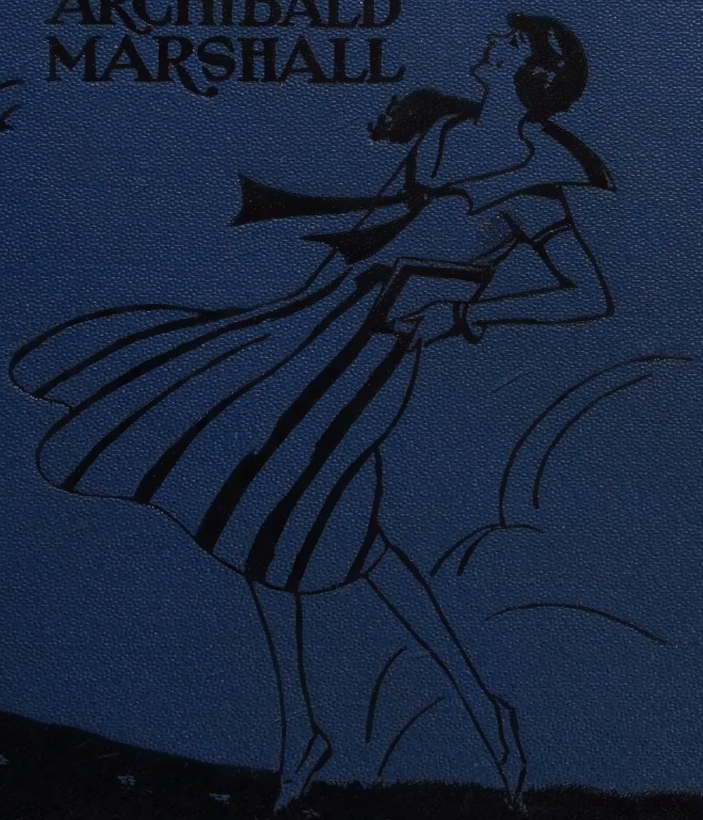


JOHN

by
ARCHIBALD
MARSHALL



JOHN



She had on her dressing gown, but her face was white and her
eyes wide with fear.

Page 159

JOHN

BY

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

AUTHOR OF "AUDACIOUS ANN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

AGNES C. LEHMAN



NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1928

COPYRIGHT, 1926,
By DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. BY
Quinn & Boden Company, Inc.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
RAHWAY NEW JERSEY

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

She had on her dressing gown, but her face was white and her eyes wide with fear . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Of their aunt they had heard little, but John had formed the impression that she was severe . . .	PAGE 15
For at Yaxenham they had full freedom out of doors	26
She and Bridgit and another girl called Diana Cressbrook went for walks together . . .	63
They were just finishing, when the door opened, and Miss Prout appeared on the threshold, in a state of undress and wearing her most severe expression	87
They spoke in whispers and crept into the water and waded out until it was deep enough to swim	133



JOHN

I

JOHN and Jane were born of the same parents, but were not brother and sister, as might have been supposed from their names. The elder of them was christened Myee, but she took an early dislike to the name, partly because she thought it more suitable to a black "gin," as the Australian women are called, partly because she thought she ought to have been a boy, and would much have preferred it if that could have been arranged for her.

So at the age of three or thereabouts she renamed herself, after a much-admired English cousin who had visited her father's station. "I'm John now and not Myee," she said, and stuck to it with the determination that was already showing itself in her character. She would answer to no other name but the one she had adopted, except from her mother,

who sometimes called her Myee when they were alone and very secret together.

John and Jane were brought up on their father's station of Wallaroo, with an occasional visit to Sydney, which both of them disliked, except for the yachting and horse-racing. At the age of ten John made another announcement with equal firmness: "I am going to be a jockey."

Two years later she rode one of her father's horses at an up-country meeting, and won her race too. But by that time she was old enough to see that she had made a mistake in her choice of a career. A girl she was, and the older she grew the more of a girl she would have to be. She made no wry face about it. "I shall not be a jockey," she said. "When I said I should I was too young to understand. And I shall not ride in a race again."

Her father thought this was going too far. The children almost lived on horseback when they were at home, and could ride anything that the most hardened station hand could ride. There was no reason why John, and Jane too if she wanted to, should not ride in an occasional race for a few years longer. Other girls did sometimes, at those informal

meetings where everybody knew everybody else and they were all so friendly together. But John had made up her mind, and when she announced a decision she seldom gave reasons for it. Jane followed her lead in most things, though sometimes in a rebellious spirit. She was as good on a horse as John was, but never rode in a race at all.

The children wore out several governesses, but picked up a fair amount of education. There was always talk of their going to school in England, but their mother did not want to be parted from them, and when the time came when they should have gone she was not strong enough to make the long journey. It was put off for a year, and then for another year, and they were glad enough of it. They wanted no better life than the one they led in the glorious freedom of the Bush. Life in England might provide some attractions, such as fox-hunting and school games, but it could not possibly come up to Australia, take it all round as a country to live in.

II

WHEN John was fifteen and Jane thirteen, their mother died. John wanted to go to England less than ever then, for she thought it her place to stay and look after her father. But Jane wanted to go away. When the break was made, and they were on the ship for the six weeks' voyage, John admitted that she had been wrong. "I hated leaving Daddy and I hated leaving Wallaroo," she said. "But Daddy couldn't get it into his head that I am old enough to take mother's place. When we come back I shall be. And this is very jolly for the present. I think we're going to have lots of fun."

They were dressing for dinner, with the porthole of their cabin wide open to the shimmering sea. Jane threw a quick look at her. It was the first time she had talked as if it were possible for them ever to have any fun any more, and she had accused Jane of forgetting sometimes. Jane had never forgotten. She was subject to sudden outbursts of desolate grief even now, but she knew by this time, though she did

not tell herself so, that the wound would heal. Even their father had laughed and joked with her before they had left home. John had controlled herself more than she. Jane had sometimes heard her crying in the middle of the night, and at the first her own outbursts had made John break down too. But she wouldn't indulge her grief in company, not even in Jane's, and when that happened she ran away by herself, and seemed to Jane a little hard when she appeared again.

But Jane was an easy philosophic soul. John's ways were John's ways, and she had to put up with them, only keeping watch that she didn't become too bossy over her. Even now, when John talked about having fun on the ship, she said nothing about a change of tone, but only: "It will be nice to be as naughty as we want to. I don't think Mr. Halliday will mind as long as we make him laugh." To which John replied with simple directness: "I'm quite ready to be naughty sometimes. I don't suppose they'll let us at school. But I like this ship, and am going to enjoy myself."

They did enjoy the voyage, and both of them were consistently and ingeniously naughty as long as it

lasted, but also popular among the passengers, except for a few of the ladies, who thought it a great pity that they should be going home in charge of an indulgent old bachelor. Some of them tried to remedy the lack of feminine supervision, but their efforts were not well received. John told Mrs. Cooper, who got her and Jane by themselves one morning, and talked to them like a mother, or perhaps rather more like a prim aunt, that she was quite old enough to see that Jane didn't misbehave herself in any way that really mattered; and Jane, playing up for once to a pretension which she usually resisted, said with an air of innocence more suitable to a little thing of eight than a girl of thirteen: "I'm always good when John tells me to be good."

"You are neither of you good," said Mrs. Cooper. "You are one as bad as the other, and I want to have a nice little talk with you, and point out to you—"

"I'm afraid we haven't time now," John interrupted her, but not rudely. "We promised to play Bull at ten o'clock. And anyhow we both do whatever Mr. Halliday tells us, and he is so kind that we shouldn't like him to think that anybody was blaming him for not looking after us better."

With that she went off, and gave Mr. Halliday an account of Mrs. Cooper's well-meant intervention, embroidering it a little so as to make him laugh, for it was well understood that as long as they kept him amused they had nothing to fear from his somewhat peppery wrath. He had the next station to their father's. It was five and twenty miles away, but that was nothing in the Bush, and they had seen him more often than any of their neighbours, ever since their babyhood. He had been devoted to their mother, and was the only person except Jane that John liked to talk to about her sometimes. She had run away from him when he had done it first, but he had persisted, and was so kind, and so wise in making it all perfectly natural, that she loved him better than any one except her father and Jane.

Whether he was altogether wise in his treatment of the children committed to his charge is another matter. There was no doubt about their naughtiness, but it was seldom exhibited in a way to discommode their elders, and never in a way to discommode him. Mrs. Cooper certainly wouldn't have allowed Jane to begin dinner at the wrong end, and then go through it all again; nor would she have let John,

who was old enough to know better, as she justly remarked, appear at an improvised fancy ball got up to resemble Mr. Halliday.

Mr. Halliday was not much taller than John, who was shooting up now, but he measured three or four times as much round the middle. John had borrowed a suit of his clothes, without his permission, and corrected the discrepancy of girth with pillows. She enjoyed the applause she received on her first appearance, and her imitations of Mr. Halliday's little eccentricities of manner and speech were received by nobody more genially than by him. But after a time discomfort of body extended to discomfort of mind. A sense of indelicacy began to steal over her, and she wished she hadn't done it. The trouble was that, though old enough in years, she was not yet old enough in mind to decide for herself exactly how far she could go, or even how far she might want to have gone when she came to think it over afterwards. And Mr. Halliday couldn't tell her. She would have to find out these things for herself now, and make mistakes in the process.

Before the dance was half over a sense of loneliness and desolation came over her. She went to her

cabin, tore off Mr. Halliday's clothes and threw them on to the floor, in a way to which that precise bachelor would strongly have objected if he had seen her, and threw herself on to the bed to weep for the loss of her mother.

But wait a minute! It was no time to indulge in a private grief, with the sound of the music in her ears and the movement of the dancers' feet immediately over her head. If she stayed away more than a few minutes people would begin to ask where she was, and if she let herself cry she couldn't go back again without everybody's seeing that she had been crying. She got up at once, dressed herself quickly but carefully in her prettiest evening frock, and was back on deck again before she had been missed. "A joke is a joke," she said to Mr. Halliday, "but your clothes aren't at all comfortable, and I'm glad to get out of them."

"Well, you certainly look better in your own," said Mr. Halliday with an admiring glance at her slim white-clad figure and the ripples of her hair tied back with a black bow. "You were an impudent young monkey to take mine. I hope you folded them up carefully."

"I've left them in a flat place," she said, remembering the cabin floor.



III

SPRING had officially arrived when the children landed in England, but the signs of it which they had been led to expect from poems administered to them by homesick governesses were absent. The sky was dark and the east wind blew chill discomfort.

Travelling from London to the East Coast, where spring comes late at the best of times, they looked out on to the unfamiliar landscape with small appreciation of its English charm. The trees were all bare, and Jane, unused to the phenomenon of trees that shed their leaves in winter, wondered why they had all been ring-barked. John had an eye for colour, and found the soft tints of the countryside not unpleasing. But they wanted the sun to bring out their beauty, the glorious sun of which they had sometimes had too much in Australia, but would miss dreadfully in this cold dark England. She was pleased with the snug villages, the old churches, the manor-houses and the farms and the cottages which

passed in almost unbelievably rapid succession before their eyes. It was the England of which she had read and seen pictures, and of which her mother had told her. Some day they had been going to see it together. But she was too dispirited for it to affect her to more than a mild interest. She thought it inferior to Australia, and said so to the maid who had been sent to fetch them.

The maid had no opinion to offer about Australia, which to her was no more than "Geography," but she didn't like to hear her country run down. "Ah, you wait till you get to Yaxenham, Miss," she said. "That'll be like coming 'ome to you."

There was some consolation in the thought of Yaxenham. It was the place in which their father had been brought up, and John had many pictures of it in her mind. The fine stone house, so much larger than any she had ever seen in Australia, larger and finer than Government House in Sydney to which she had gone to a children's party, the beautiful gardens, the stables full of horses—she saw them all with the vivid eye of her mind, and if her pictures were partly the outcome of imagination, it would be all the more interesting to correct them.

Her father had talked most about the sports which he had enjoyed in his youth, and sometimes later during visits to England. It was the fox-hunting that had most captured her. Would she and Jane be allowed to hunt? She wasn't quite sure that hunting went on as late as this, and asked Lawrence, the maid.

"Oh, bless me, I don't know about all that," said Lawrence. "I've only been at Yaxenham for a year, and never out of a place in London before. But there's been no hunting from Yaxenham ever since I been there."

"I suppose there are horses to ride," said John.

"There's a pony for mowing the lawns. Perhaps you can ride him if you want to, Miss."

"Do you mean to say there are no horses at all? There used to be such a lot when father was young."

"What should we want horses for now, Miss? We use motors for getting about in. I suppose you don't have them in Australia. And as for riding, Sir Edward's sciatica's so bad that he can only hobble about, and there's nobody but him and her ladyship at Yaxenham now. They say it was different in the old days, but we keep very quiet now. You'll liven

us up now you've come home. There's a swing in the garden, and a see-saw. Sir Edward had them done up when he heard you were coming."

A swing and a see-saw! But it was kind of their uncle to have thought of them, and fitted in with what they had heard of him. He was many years older than their father, quite an old man now. Of their aunt they had heard little, but John had formed the impression that she was severe. She had been almost more like a stepmother to their own father, for his parents had both died young, and he had lived under the care of his brother until he had grown up.

But Aunt Eleanor had never failed to send them presents at Christmas, for which they had written formal letters of thanks, somewhat expanded in later years with a scarcely less formal account of their movements, and information about the current state of the weather, which was usually fine. It was to be supposed that she would be kind too. John's independence was not so complete but that she would be glad to be with a woman, to whom she would in some sort belong. The voyage home, unexpectedly amusing as it had been, had lasted quite long enough. It



Of their aunt they had heard little, but John had formed the impression that she was severe.

was a comfort to have a home to go to, and to be on the way there.

The bleak evening was drawing in. How cold and dull England was, after the warmth and brightness of Australia! But perhaps it would improve as the year advanced.



IV

THERE was not much warmth at Yaxenham Hall, either for the body or the spirit, during the fortnight the children spent there. They obtained glances of the English spring, in primrose-carpeted woods, daffodils sheeting the old orchard of gnarled trees, in which innumerable birds, strange to them but all the more fascinating on that account, were busy nesting, and sang incredibly whenever a peep of the sun encouraged them to the idea that the cold dark days were coming to an end. But for the most part the cold dark days lingered, and the children wondered how they could have been so ungrateful as to complain of the heat of the sun in the land of their upbringing.

And the house was so cold. It was a fine house, with innumerable rooms, all beautifully furnished but most of them shut up. There were something like thirty bedrooms, but only one bathroom, and you could never be sure of getting water that was

more than warm in that. There was no general heating apparatus, and there were no fires in bedrooms, or at least there was never any suggestion that the children should have one in theirs. In fact, the only fires, except in the kitchen regions, were in the morning-room and the library. Aunt Eleanor used the one and Uncle Edward the other, and when the children were in the house they sat in the morning-room with their aunt; or else they could go into what had been the schoolroom, but there was no fire in that. Still they preferred to shiver there on rainy mornings rather than to sit still and behave themselves in the morning-room. And they were not forbidden to go out in the rain. The tradition of Yaxenham was that young people should be brought up to endure a reasonable amount of hardship. That these two, sun-baked all their lives, had to endure rather more than a reasonable amount did not appear to enter the head of Aunt Eleanor, nor even of Uncle Edward, kind as he was.

Perhaps the cold to which he had been disciplined had not been the best thing for him, though in his youth he had been as hard as nails. Now, on his bad days he could only get about on crutches, and his

bad days lasted all the time the children were there. He never sat down to a meal in the great dining-room, which was as cold as a vault, without wishing for warmer weather, but when John ventured to say: "Why don't you have a fire in here until it gets warmer?" he smiled and said: "Oh, we haven't had fires here or in the hall after the first of April for as long as I can remember, and that's over sixty years. Too late to begin now." And Aunt Eleanor looked at John with a frown, but said nothing.

Uncle Edward took his disabilities courageously enough, and joked over his crutches, which John was always watchful to bring to him as soon as he wanted them. A secret devotion was springing up in her towards this kind old man, not so very old in years, and sometimes surprisingly young when he forgot his crippled state, and you could forget it too, as he talked about the past years, when he had been Master of Hounds, when life at Yaxenham had been full and gay, and there had been no lack of money to carry it on in the lavish hospitable way in which it had been carried on there for generations.

That was part of the trouble that overshadowed Yaxenham, and counted for more in the general dis-

comfort that lay about the children than the inclemencies of a more than usually late spring, and more than they had any idea of, used as they were to a life in which considerations of money had never entered, and seeing only this ample stately house, and all that belonged to it in the way of lordship over the surrounding countryside.

But there was no longer enough money at Yaxenham for more than a very quiet life, to be lived in surroundings designed for something quite different. The war and the subsequent taxation had hit the landowners more harshly than any other class. The bulk of Sir Edward's income had come from the land, and but for the small proportion of it drawn from other sources he could not have gone on living at Yaxenham at all. The rich shell was there still, but it was a burden rather than an asset, and its owner would have been far better off if he had sold it and gone to live elsewhere. But his life would have been empty without Yaxenham. He had to make the best of it, and hand it over to his heir, with all its treasures intact if possible.

Who was his heir? John was, after her father, supposing he didn't marry again and have a son.

She had no idea of it, but it counted in her reception at Yaxenham.

Sir Edward's only son, after whom she had named herself, had been killed in the war. He liked to talk to her about him. He had been proud of his son, and pinned his hopes upon him, as somebody to whom he could hand on his trust who would be worthy of it, and carry on the name after him. He had resigned himself to his loss, and was too just, and sweet-tempered too, to visit it upon the child who would some day take his place. Perhaps he never thought of her like that. She had loved his son as a little child, and could add to his memories some of her own. She liked to walk by his side as he took his painful exercise up and down the terrace, and tell him about those days, so short a time ago to him, so long to her, when her cousin had stayed with them and enjoyed the free active life of the Bush. And he would tell her of his hunting exploits in England, and branch off to memories of his own youth. But he would always come back to his boy, and John could see how he had cherished the thought of him, as a little child, as a schoolboy, and as a young man with all his bright promise in front of him.

But Aunt Eleanor was different. She never talked of her son to anybody. God knows what thoughts passed through her mind as she sat hour after hour at her useless embroidery, her eyes never raised, her lips, through which no word came, tightly compressed. If she could have given them utterance the bitterness that was corroding her life might have found some relief. But she would admit no consolation of her unhappiness, certainly not the advent of two children from that far off and to her uncivilized country, in which her son had spent some months of his short life which he might have spent with her. And one of the children was his supplanter, a girl, who called herself by his name.

But that she wouldn't have. The only time she made any reference to her loss was when she first heard Jane call her sister John. "That name is sacred in this house," she said, with tight lips and burning eyes, "and it is not to be used of you in my hearing."

It was John whom she addressed, showing something of her feelings towards her at that moment, though she was careful to conceal them at other times. She would do her duty by these motherless children,

and for placid Jane, who was not afraid of her, and could arouse her out of her silent fits by her chatter, she seemed to have a liking. But John was an offence to her, a daily and hourly reminder of what she had lost.



V

JOHN had a little talk with Jane in the train on their way to school. They had been allowed to travel by themselves, for it was only a two hours' journey, with one easy change. John felt important on that account. Although she was fifteen, she and Jane had never yet gone anywhere unattended. She was in charge, and perhaps a little over-anxious to justify her responsibility.

But it was not through mere bossiness, of which Jane was apt to accuse her, that she wanted to have that little talk, something after the manner in which their mother had talked to her, in a deep intimacy, and said things that had made all the more impression on her because they were seldom said. It was not on her own account that she most missed her mother just now. It seemed to her infinitely sad that a child of Jane's age, embarking upon a new life among strangers, far away from her home, should have no mother in whom she could confide. Suppos-

ing anything went wrong at school and she was unhappy, to whom could she go? There was no one to whom she could even write. John did ardently desire to play the part of an elder sister to her. She was old enough, and she thought she was wise enough, if she could only repress the occasional inclination she had to play the frisky two-year-old herself. She had behaved like that on the ship and had had a lot of fun out of it; but she had been sobered by the fortnight at Yaxenham, where life had been so suppressed that it was a relief to get away from it, even though they were going to something quite unfamiliar, and she didn't know but what life might be still more suppressed at school. For at Yaxenham they had had full freedom out of doors, and she had begun to feel the life of the English country, as it was reflected in what went on on the soil, and to find it good.

They were alone in their carriage. Jane was reading a child's paper. John had bought "The Queen" at the bookstall, but it was a number devoted mainly to the fashions of the season, and she could not take more than a mild interest in them. She threw a glance at Jane, and it came over her what a child



For at Yaxenham they had full freedom out of doors.

she still was, with her fair loose hair and her very short skirt. She remembered the time when Jane had been a fat gurgling baby, and she, so much older, had adored her. She had something of the same protective feeling towards her now; she had been the darling of her childhood, and was still her little sister, to be cherished and shielded.

She mustn't make the mistake of beginning on a note that would arouse Jane's opposition. "Put down your paper. I want to have a little talk with you." She had a faint sense of amusement as the words suggested themselves to her. But it was with a lump in her throat that she said in a slightly off-hand manner: "I'm not sorry we're going to school. I don't know what it will be like, but we ought to get on all right if we stick together."

Jane did lay down her paper, quite ready to talk. On any note of equality she was eminently companionable. "I'm glad they are going to give us a room to ourselves," she said. "I suppose we shall like the other girls all right, but we shall want to be by ourselves sometimes."

"They will be different from us," John said. "We have had a much better life than they have, but I ex-

pect we shall have to fall in with some of their ways."

There was a touch of Colonial superiority in this. English girls, of whom they had met scarcely any so far, must have something of the nature of prim Misses compared with Australian girls, who led such a gloriously free and open life. But Jane said: "It won't do to give ourselves airs over them. We shall only be two among forty."

There was sense in this. Jane had a lot of sense. But John didn't want to draw inspiration from it at that moment. She wanted to provide most of the sense herself. "Oh, of course we don't want to get up against them," she said. "But if any of them are horrid, as they are sometimes in books about schools, they might be horrid to us, because we're different. I shouldn't so much mind for myself, but I should hate it if they were horrid to you."

"I don't see why they should be," said Jane, and had another look at her paper.

Jane never met troubles halfway. With her protective mood full upon her, John pictured her going guilelessly among ill-disposed people, defenceless against attack, which, if it came, would have a blight-

ing influence upon her. She didn't want to frighten Jane, but she did want her to feel that, whatever happened, she would not be defenceless. She would have her older sister—so much older, as John saw herself at the moment—as a support and a refuge.

"You're much younger than me," she said. She couldn't say "than I," as she had been taught, at that moment, which was too fraught with emotion for pedantry, but she tried to keep to the offhand note; and even a little humour wouldn't be out of place. "I loved you when you were a tiny baby, I don't know why, but I did, even before you were trained to the house. And I love you just as much now, though we never talk about that."

"No, of course we don't," said Jane, rather bored; but added, since the subject had been mentioned: "I love you just as much, you know."

"Yes, I know you do," said John. "Well, I don't care much what happens to me, but I do care awfully what happens to you, darling, and I do want—"

"Oh, I don't think anything is going to happen to either of us if we don't play the goat too much," Jane interrupted her. She took up her paper decisively. John had one of her unaccountable fits on,

when she liked playing at being something or some one. Sometimes it was amusing to humour her, until she grew tired of it. But if she was playing up now to take the place of their mother, there was no humouring that. She had better put a stop to it at once. She looked up again. "Sometimes we shall want to be naughty," she said, "as we were on the ship. We may not feel like it now, but it's sure to come over us, and you'll want it just as much as I shall. When that happens we'll stick together—won't we?"

The question at the end showed that she wasn't wanting to put herself into opposition to John. She did love her, though it was the habit of neither of them to talk about it. That John had put it into words showed that she wasn't quite herself at the moment. She must be helped to get on to normal ground.

"It's a compact," said John shortly—a phrase that was in common use between them. She felt hurt that Jane hadn't responded to her mood, but knew that it was no good trying to express it any further. As for being naughty, Jane was still of an age when fits of naughtiness came upon you with irresistible force. You had to be naughty sometimes, just as

you had to run and jump about when you felt like that. John thought she would never want to be naughty any more on her own account. It was a childish complaint which she had outgrown; but she had outgrown it so very recently that perhaps Jane could not be expected to understand how different she was from the John who had played Old Harry on the ship, and had spent a happy hour only two days before pig-sticking, urging the garden pony to unwonted agility among the litters of the home farm, until the sport was interfered with by the bailiff.

Well, perhaps she had said enough. Jane wouldn't talk, but there might come a time when she would be glad to have an elder sister to whom she could come for comfort and advice. John made up her mind to hold herself ready for that time, and returned to the fashion plates of "The Queen," which were after all rather interesting when one was growing up and wanted to look nice on occasions.

VI

“**N**OW for it!” said John, as she and Jane drove up to St. Hilda’s School. “We’ll behave as well as we can, but we’ll stick together, and we won’t let them put upon us.”

It was the crystallization of all she had meant to say to Jane in the train, but with the maternal note, which had not gone down well, left out.

“It’s a compact,” said Jane readily, and John felt that she had not wholly failed.

St. Hilda’s was a large red brick house on the edge of a cliff, with several acres of garden around it. The garden was not old enough to present any particular charm on a first view of it, but John caught sight of the tennis courts, all ready for play, as they drove up to the door, and there was the sea, lying still and blue on this afternoon of early May, on which the weather had made a sudden jump from winter to premature summer. “Really, this isn’t so bad,” she said. “We may enjoy ourselves here, after all.”

"I'm ready for a little enjoyment," said Jane, hopefully.

Miss Parker, the head mistress, came to the door to meet them. She was a tall upright woman with beautifully arranged grey hair. She would have been good-looking but for a nose rather larger than was suitable to the rest of her features. Perhaps she was good-looking even with that drawback. She wore pince-nez, which made her look scholastic, but her manner was pleasant enough as she shook hands with the children and bade them welcome to St. Hilda's.

"You're the first arrivals," she said. "You know that only the new girls come to-day. All the rest to-morrow. The London train won't be in for half an hour. So I shall put you into the way of things, and then you will be able to help me with the others. How did you leave Sir Edward and Lady Aubrey? Well, I hope."

John reassured her on this point, and she led the way upstairs, talking all the time.

"I like to make my girls feel at home," she said. "I was sent to school myself when I was very young, and I was so miserable at first that I said to myself:

'If ever I have a school of my own I will make it as much like a home as possible.' It is not so easy to do when a school gets to large numbers, and St. Hilda's is increasing so rapidly that we shall have to enlarge ourselves after this term. I am going to build another house. It is already rather a tight fit for us in this one. However, I hope you will be comfortable here. The room is small, but next term I shall be able to give you a larger one."

The room was certainly small, not very much larger than the cabin they had shared on the ship, and, as they had slept one over the other there, there was even less floor space. But it was clean and fresh, and had a view of the sea. Miss Parker opened the window. "We always enjoy ourselves in the summer term," she said. "We have our own private bathing-place, and there is a beautiful stretch of sand there. We go in especially for lawn tennis, and we have some very good players. We don't play cricket, as they do in the big schools, for I have always thought it wasn't a game for girls. What I like my girls to understand is that they *are* girls, and we rule our lives here on that understanding. If you will remember that, and that you are to treat

St. Hilda's as far as possible as if it were your own home, I am sure you will be very happy here. Now I must go down. They will bring up your trunks immediately, and you had better unpack and tidy yourselves away. Then you can come down and help me receive the others. There are eight of them besides yourselves, and I have had to refuse three. In fact, I had to make a special arrangement to take you two, but I was glad to do so for Lady Aubrey's sake."

When she had left them they looked at each other. Did they like her? They hardly knew. They were disposed to, because it would make things easier to like the person under whose rule they had to live, but she had given them nothing much to take hold of. "We shall hear from the others what she's really like," said John acutely. "But I don't think it's going to be so bad. It looks as if we should have to stand on our heads to do our hair, and apparently we're not supposed to wash, as there isn't a wash-stand."

"Perhaps we're expected to do that in the private bathing-place," said Jane.

A man came up with one of their trunks, ushered

in by a stout smiling woman who explained that she was the matron. "Mrs. Dent, my name is, dears," she said. "My husband was a Rector in Derbyshire. You must come to me for anything you want. I've a nice little sitting-room of my own, and when girls have been *very* good I ask them to tea with me sometimes. You come from Australia, don't you? And lost your mother, poor darlings! Well, it's a sad world when those we love are taken from us; but we've all got to help each other here, haven't we? those who are left behind; and we know we shall meet by and by. This is a poky little room, I'm afraid, and only used for one before, but we take as many as we can get in, and manage somehow. You'll have to wash in the bathroom for the present. I'll show you where it is. What pretty frocks! I do like my children to look nice. I call you all my children, you know. I never had any of my own, but forty isn't too many, and you two will make forty-one. Now would you like to give me your pocket-money, to give out to you so much a week? So many come back with plenty, and before the term's half over it's: 'Oh, I haven't got a penny for anything.' The sensible ones let me take care of it for them, and

they're as well off at the end of the term as at the beginning."

John accepted this offer, more because she saw that it would please the matron than because she felt herself incapable of husbanding her resources; and Jane followed suit. Mrs. Dent exclaimed at the sum they handed over. Their father had given them five pounds apiece for the voyage, and they had spent little of it, for Mr. Halliday had paid for their trips ashore. Uncle Edward had given them a pound each that morning, and Aunt Eleanor ten shillings. "You'll have more than any of them," Mrs. Dent said, "but I shouldn't tell them so if I were you; and I never tell any girl about the private affairs of another. Now I must be off, but I must just give you a kiss each, which I don't as a rule, for I don't believe in petting and making favourites. But you're such a pretty pair, just what I'd have liked my own girls to be, if I'd had any; but we weren't blessed, as my good husband used to say. We'll keep it between ourselves, and pretend nothing of the sort has happened before the others."

The good lady ambled off, after giving them two resounding smacks. John's eyes were a little moist,

but she said: "She's a kind old thing. I like her better than Miss Parker."

"They're both all right in their own way," said Jane. "Now let's go and receive the other girls. We shall have been here longer than they will, anyhow. We can show them round."



VII

JOHN had a pleasant surprise in finding a friend, or at least an acquaintance, in one of the new arrivals. This was a girl of sixteen, Lady Bridgit de Burgh, whose father had been an Australian Governor. John had met her two years before at the party at Government House, and they had found themselves kindred spirits. Bridgit was a happy-looking freckled girl, with lovely violet eyes, but no other claims to beauty. It seemed, however, that she was not particularly happy at this moment, for she was annoyed at being sent to school at her age, and told John all about it as they walked round the garden together after tea.

"All my sisters have gone and got married," she said, "and it isn't worth while having a governess for me alone. Besides, Daddy can't afford it. He spent such a lot in Australia, and we're always hard up at home. Still, I should have had a glorious time. You never know what's going to happen in Ireland.

Things are quieting down now, but they nearly burnt our house down more than once. It's a mouldy business having to come to school and be a good girl at my time of life; and did you ever see such a lot as those little worms I came down with? I shouldn't think any of them had ever been on a horse in her life."

They talked horse enthusiastically for some time, and liked each other better every moment. "I'm jolly glad you're here," said Bridgit. "It will be a mouldy business, anyhow, for people who have had the time that we have, but we shall have something to talk about together."

"I think it is going to be better than I expected," John said. "If we've got to be at school, I should think this would be as good a one as any."

"I had a cousin here," said Bridgit. "She learnt how to wangle things, and got on all right. You've only got to keep your eye on Nosey Parker's nose if she tries to annoy you, and she wilts. She hates thinking anybody is noticing it."

It gave John a slight shock to hear Miss Parker referred to in that way. "I thought she seemed quite decent," she said.

"Oh, she's all right for a schoolmistress. But Norah says she doesn't really care about anything but getting on, and having the right sort of girls here, and thousands of them. She likes them with titles if possible. I shall work mine for all it's worth. You haven't got a title, I suppose, have you?"

"Not at present. I dare say they'll make me a Duchess by and by."

Bridgit laughed at this. "You're a lad after my own heart," she said. "We'll have a lot of fun together here, and see that we get it. Parker was governess to Norah and her sisters, and my aunt helped her to start her school. She wanted to make it into one of those big places run like a boys' school, but my aunt thinks that girls should be girls; so that's got to be the stunt here."

"And you're to treat it as a home," suggested John.

"A pretty mouldy sort of home! They didn't get enough to eat at first, or if they did it wasn't worth eating. Norah got that put right. It's rather the other way about now. Parker can't bear parting with a penny, but she sees that it's worth while to get a reputation for doing things well. She's quite clever, but she wants watching, and it doesn't do to give in

to her too much. Oh, I know all about Nosey Parker, and she's just what Norah has told me. I could see it in the twinkling of an eye."

John also thought she knew all about Miss Parker now, and would be able to deal with her. "I rather like Mrs. Dent," she said.

"Oh, she's an old dear, full of family affection. You can get anything you like out of her if you don't forget her husband was a clergyman, and give her a kiss sometimes, as if she was so nice you couldn't help it. Well, she *is* nice. When Norah was ill she sat up with her all night; and she needn't have done it. Her job is to look after the housekeeping and save the pennies. All the rest is what she likes doing, because she likes girls."

"What are the mistresses like?"

"A pretty mouldy lot. Parker doesn't pay them enough, and the ones who are any good don't stay long. I don't think there are any that were here when Norah was, except that little Miss Robinson who came down with us this afternoon. Parker got her cheap, and she doesn't know enough to get another job. She does all right for the little ones, and she's a sort of maid to Parker besides."

"Is she the little one with fair hair, who looked as if she had been crying?"

"Yes. She *had* been crying. She has an invalid mother, and she gets very homesick away from her. They're dreadfully poor. She wanted to have her mother in lodgings here, and live with her. But Parker wouldn't have that. She wants her in the house, so that she can get more work out of her."

"Well, I do call that horrible! Do the girls treat her properly?"

"Oh, I think so. She only has to do with the little ones."

"Can't we make friends with her, and make it easier for her here?"

"You won't find her very interesting. I had a talk with her coming down. She won't say a word against Parker."

"That shows she must be a good sort. I shall make friends with her, whether she's interesting or not."

"All right, my dear. You take your own line. I hate people who hang on, and only do what I tell them."

"You didn't think *I* should be like that, did you?"

"I didn't think anything about you, except that you

were rather plain-looking. You're not so important as all that."

The conversation then took the line of schoolgirl chaff, which, although neither of them had been to school before, seemed to come natural to them, and put them in very good humour with each other. Bridgit was the more outspoken, John had the neater wit, but each said outrageous things to the other, and both thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

John was full of her new friend when she and Jane were in their room together at the end of the day. "I don't care what the others are like now," she said. "Bridgit and I ought to be equal to them."

Jane had also made a friend, a girl of her age called Betty Goring. "I like her awfully," she said. "She hasn't been to school before and is rather afraid of it. But Miss Parker is a friend of her mother's, and she was awfully kind to her this evening. I wasn't quite sure about her this afternoon, but I like her now."

"What, Nosey Parker!" said John. "I've been hearing a lot about *her*. She wants watching."

VIII

THE next morning was chiefly occupied by Miss Parker in a diligent examination of the new girls, whom she assigned to various classes according to their ability, or lack of it. They went in to her one by one, and the rest of them hung about the garden, or in the gymnasium, which was also the music-room.

Bridgit went in first, and was absent for about ten minutes. "You're the next man in," she said to John, when she came out. "Pretend to know less than you do, or she'll put you in a high form, and you'll have to work harder. I'm only in the Third."

John was inclined to be ashamed of the little she thought she did know, and had been intending to take the opposite course to that recommended by her friend. But if Bridgit didn't mind going in with the younger girls, why should she? The best thing would be for them to be in a form together; then they could pursue their friendship in school as well as out.

Miss Parker looked rather formidable, sitting at a table with a pile of papers in front of her, and Miss Beal, her chief assistant, by her side. But she said with a smile: "Now, my dear, don't be frightened. I dare say you haven't learnt as much as you would have done if you had been to school. Girls seldom do, unless they have had an exceptionally good governess from the beginning, and I suppose they were difficult to get in Australia. We shall soon get you on here if you work hard and do your best."

John was slightly annoyed at the doubt cast upon the ability of her governesses; or rather, since she had thought but little of them hitherto, at the assumption that they couldn't be as good in Australia as elsewhere. But if that was to be the idea, it would be all the easier to follow Bridgit's advice.

Miss Parker and Miss Beal both asked her questions, and she found that the advice was difficult to follow, for she had no innate fancy for making herself out more ignorant than she was, and it is not in the nature of a girl to shirk school work, as it is in that of a boy.

Well, I think it might be the Second," Miss Parker said, when the examination had gone on for some

time. "It is certainly a little bit beyond you at present, but I'm sure you have the brains, and you seem willing to use them. You will have to work extra hard to keep up, but I can trust you to do that, can't I? You will please me best by doing so. Miss Beal, will you see how she is in Mathematics, while I get these papers into order? That will decide it."

Arithmetic, and the little Algebra and Geometry she had done, were John's strong points, and Jane's too; but only one of their governesses had had more than a smattering of them herself, and John had no idea of how she might stand with other girls of her age.

Just as Miss Beal was beginning to ask her questions, little Miss Robinson crept into the room, with a lace blouse in her hands, which apparently she had been altering. She had a whispered word with Miss Parker, who left her papers and retired with her to the window.

John's blood boiled. The poor little mouse-like thing, with her pale sandy hair and her red-rimmed eyes, which looked as if she had spent the night crying, had already been set to menial work, which surely had nothing to do with what she had been en-

gaged for. Miss Parker was speaking sharply to her too, treating her like a servant, too stupid to understand the instructions that had been given her. Had she no sense of shame, that she could leave the important business of the moment like this, and busy herself with such a thing as dressmaking, in the very eyes of a person whom she had just been exhorting to concentrated effort? She had said that John would please her best by working hard. John had no wish to please her, by that or any other means. She would have liked to tell her exactly what she thought of her at that moment. Nosey Parker! She was a skin-flint and a slave-driver, not fit to be trusted with the education of girls, whatever her scholastic attainments may have been.

Miss Robinson crept out of the room, and Miss Parker came back to the table.

"The mathematics are disappointing," said Miss Beal. "She seems to know scarcely anything. Hardly up to Third form class, certainly not Second."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said Miss Parker. "Then I'm afraid that must settle it for this term. I'm very sorry, Myee, but there are many people, very intelli-

gent otherwise, who have no head for mathematics. You must work as hard as you can at them, and if you make good general progress I shall move you up into the Second form next term. I've had to put Bridgit de Burgh into the Third, so you will have somebody even older than yourself to keep you company, and you mustn't mind too much being among the younger ones."

John wanted to say that she was not one of the people, otherwise intelligent, who had no head for mathematics; but it seemed, after all, rather an ineffective way of showing her disapproval of Miss Parker to have pretended to understand few of Miss Beal's questions, and to have purposely muddled her answers to those. And she had fulfilled her purpose of being placed in the same form as Bridgit, though she had lost sight of it until Miss Parker's reminder. She said nothing, but kept her eye aggressively fixed upon the beacon of Miss Parker's out-jutting nose, and it seemed to her that Miss Parker disliked this, for she coloured slightly under the gaze, looked down, and said shortly: "Send your sister Jane to me."

John left the room, with her head in the air. It

took her some minutes to find Jane in the garden, and she had time to reflect that it would hardly fit in with the part she wished to play towards her to hand on the advice she had received from Bridgit. She had time to reflect a little further that it would have been better for her elder sisterly pride if she had been in a higher form than Jane, who, if she showed up well, would certainly be placed with her in the Third. But when she found her she had only time to say rather crossly: "I've been looking for you everywhere. You're to go in to Miss Parker at once."

Jane ran off, and John went to find Bridgit, who was not particularly thrilled with her account of Miss Parker's oppression of Miss Robinson, but expressed pleasure at John's being in the same form as herself. "You upset yourself too much about other people," she said. "I believe in letting everybody go their own way, and as long as Parker doesn't annoy me personally I shall let her alone. She has her good points. I should think we should be able to do pretty well as we like in the Third, and I look forward to a happy lazy term."

By and by Jane came running out to find John,

grinning all over her face. "She's very pleased with me," she said. "I know more than she thought I would, and she has put me in the Second Form."



IX

JOHN had never thought of that. She was two years older than Jane, but she had scarcely learnt anything until the arrival of their first governess, and they had done the same lessons ever since. Neither of them had taken a vast amount of interest in them. John had the quicker brain, and could certainly have got ahead of Jane if she had wished. Jane had it in her to plod at her lessons, but the faculty had lain dormant in her. Certainly she was not ahead of John in anything.

Then it must have been Miss Parker's malevolence that had made her put such an affront upon the elder sister. She had been annoyed at John's staring at her nose, as Bridgit had said she would be. John had meant to annoy her by that steady unabashed gaze. But what a mean way of getting back at her!

"Well, I call that beyond everything!" she exclaimed angrily. "She has only put me in the Third."

"Me too," said Bridgit with a grin. "You'll have to help us with our work, Jane."

She turned away. Perhaps she didn't feel quite comfortable at being placed below a child of Jane's age, in spite of the careless face she put upon it.

John was quite beyond pretending that she didn't care; and it seemed that Jane cared too, for her face fell, and she said: "She didn't tell me that. She said there was another younger sister in the school who was better at lessons than her elder sister, but I thought it only meant we were to be in the same form. I call it perfectly silly. Of course you know more than I do. There must be some mistake."

"She's a horrid creature," said John. "She hates me already, and she's beginning to show it."

She burst into passionate tears, but quickly subdued them. That wasn't the way to maintain her already damaged superiority over Jane. And she didn't like to tell her of how she had disguised her knowledge. In fact she had forgotten all about that for the moment. It was Miss Parker's mean dislike of her that was the cause of the trouble.

"I'm awfully sorry, darling," said Jane. "I wouldn't have let her put me higher than you if I had

known. Why don't you go to her and say that we have always done our lessons together, and you are better at them than me? Then she'll put us in the same form, which I shall like better than anything."

John was soothed. Dear little Jane! She did sometimes feel it a comfort to have her to rely upon, as if she were much older than she actually was, and could always be trusted to do and say the right thing.

"Yes, I shall do that," she said. "Of course I shouldn't mind her putting you on a level with me, but it will make me look such a fool to be in a lower form than you. And she ought not to have done it either. I shall go to her at once."

It might have been better to wait until the examination of all the new girls was over. But John always wanted to do what she did want to do without any delay. She stationed herself at Miss Parker's door, and when a girl came out, to summon another one, she went in at once.

She meant to control herself and speak evenly, but her face was scarlet as she said: "You have put my sister, who is two years younger than I am, in a higher form than me. We have always done lessons together, and I have generally been a little in front of her."

Now Miss Parker had been considering, with the help of Miss Beal, whether it wouldn't be better to put the two sisters in the same form. In the other instance, where it was impossible, there was only a year's difference in age, and the younger sister was manifestly brighter than the elder. Perhaps something had upset John in the examination, and she hadn't shown up as well as she might have done. She seemed to be a queer-tempered girl, of no very agreeable manners. But she should have the benefit of the doubt, and be called in again, when places had been assigned to the rest.

Now here was John herself, full of suppressed but obvious resentment. If she was to take her place in the ordered community which Miss Parker prided herself upon ruling so wisely, that spirit must be quelled at the outset.

"That is not the way to address me," Miss Parker said stiffly. "You must learn, as a mark of respect, to say 'Miss Parker,' or 'Miss Beal,' when you are talking to mistresses. It is the way in all schools, which you haven't learnt yet, but must get into. But now about your place in the school. I shouldn't wish to put you in a lower form than your younger sister,

but she seemed to be more advanced than you all round, especially in mathematics, of which Miss Beal says you seemed to know scarcely anything at all."

"I have always been rather better at them than Jane," John said, and added "Miss Parker," as that absurd mode of address seemed to be required of her.

"I thought you couldn't be quite so stupid as you made yourself out," said Miss Beal brightly. "But I don't see why you should have wanted to make yourself out stupid at all."

"Why did you?" asked Miss Parker, with her eye fixed upon her.

The inclination to tell Miss Parker exactly what she thought of her had left John for the moment. After all, she had the whip hand over her. "If you will give me another chance, Miss Parker," she said, almost humbly, "I am sure I can do better."

"Yes, but tell me first why you pretended to know less than you do."

John hadn't admitted that, but could not deny it, faced with a direct question. "Because I wanted to be in the same form as Bridgit de Burgh," she blurted out. If Miss Parker had been a little less uncompromising, she would have added some ex-

pression of regret at having been so foolish. As it was, her speech sounded merely defiant.

"Oh, that was it!" said Miss Parker. "Well, I am glad to be able to oblige you. You will begin in the Third Form. And you had better think matters over. You seem to have started here in a very bad spirit, which you will have to alter. I shall say no more about this, and if you work well and behave well I will see about moving you up into the Second Form at mid-term. You may go now."

A small girl had come in to be examined, and stood listening to Miss Parker's rebuke. It was the climax of John's discomfiture. She went out in a black rage; and how she hated Miss Parker at that moment!



X

IT seemed to John at first that she would never get to know all the girls who crowded into St. Hilda's that afternoon. They were of all sorts and of all ages, from eleven or twelve to eighteen and even nineteen. There were pretty girls and plain girls, noisy girls and quiet girls, girls inclined to friendliness and girls who held themselves in reserve. That much showed itself on the first evening, but at the end of it they were still a collection of strangers. Yet in a week each of them stood clearly revealed in her separate character, and the currents and cross-currents of the life of the school were as familiar to her as if she had been there for years. Or at least she thought they were, which came to the same thing as far as she was concerned.

What she would have said was that the school was divided roughly into two factions, those who liked Miss Parker and those who didn't. But the truth was that her own resentment drew to her those who, like Bridgit, were prepared to make fun of

her and to criticize her at all points. And it met with opposition from those who were quite happy under Miss Parker's rule, and thought it improper that a new girl, or two new girls, should set a fashion in disrespect. For Bridgit, though she did not share in John's resentment, allowed herself complete freedom of tongue. So it was really John who was dividing the school into two camps, even at that early date.

Another thing that she was up against was that the older girls, and especially those of the Upper First, held themselves aloof, and gave themselves airs over the others. But she did not see that quite as it was either. There was no system of præfects at St. Hilda's. Whether or no Miss Parker's ideas of what a girls' school should be had been imposed upon her, as Bridgit had said they had, she did not follow the system taken from boys' schools of giving any girl authority over others. Those of the Upper First had certain privileges, upon which they may have prided themselves unduly; but the school was just not too large to make it possible for an unrestricted play of friendship and association, and this had been the rule hitherto. It was the fact

of two girls of character and independence being as low in place as the Third Form that was upsetting things. There were a few others as old as John, and one as old as Bridgit, but they were obviously not as bright as the rest, and they certainly never pushed their way among those who were higher up. The attitude towards them was one of friendly forbearance, but neither Bridgit nor John had any use for that. They wanted to be in everything, and on equal terms with the highest, and as this was resisted, or at least coldly looked upon, they had many a jibe between themselves at the airs of the ordinary stuffy schoolgirl, who thought herself so much better than everybody else.

John felt the humility of her position deeply, and it even affected her slightly in her attitude towards Jane, who had been placed above her. But this at least she saw in its true light, and guarded against it. And Jane was whole-hearted in her indignation at the slight that had been put upon her, and was so sympathetic about it that the sting was a little lessened. But for this, Jane was thoroughly enjoying her school life, and would have had no complaint to bring against Miss Parker or against

anybody or anything else. John also would have enjoyed it, more than she had thought possible, if she had not made that false start. Even Bridgit said that things must have improved since her cousin's time, or else she must have exaggerated. No school of the size of St. Hilda's can be quite like a home, but there was a freedom there not customary in schools. The girls who liked Miss Parker seemed to find no difficulty in making and keeping friends with her, and out of school hours treated her not entirely as a schoolmistress. It was the same with the other mistresses. Some of them were quite young, and joined in with everything out of school hours.

One of them was Miss Wetherall, who took the Third Form. She was a Girton girl who had taken a First in Modern Languages, and had spent a year over the science of teaching besides. Not even Bridgit could say that Miss Parker had got her cheap, for she could have gained a post in any school in the country. But Bridgit had dropped some of the pretences with which she had started, though she still kept to it that Miss Parker wanted watching.

A slight disagreement broke out between John and Bridgit soon after they had started school work. As new girls their places were at the bottom of the form, and Bridgit seemed quite content to stay there or thereabouts. John wasn't. It filled her with inward fury to see little girls of thirteen and even twelve above her, and stung her to put forth her powers to the utmost, so that she could show what a mistake had been made in placing her so low. At each lesson girls took each other up, according as they answered the questions put to them, and John always worked her way up to the top, or near the top. There was nobody in the school who tried harder than she did, and her lessons were always well prepared. If she hadn't got them up to her satisfaction she would spend time over them in bed, very early in the light summer mornings, making herself fight off the sleep that she wanted at her age, while Jane slumbered peacefully in the bed by her side. It was against the rules to do this, but little she cared for that.

She and Bridgit and another girl called Diana Cressbrook, went for walks together when they weren't playing lawn tennis. Three girls were al-



She and Bridgit and another girl called Diana Cressbrook went
for walks together,

lowed to go out in this way, and the surrounding country and especially the seashore was dotted with trios of them, before the bathing season began.

Bridgit told her that she was spoiling the understanding come to between them by taking so much trouble about her work. "Where's the happy lazy time we were going to have?" she asked. "If you keep pushing up to the top of the form I shall have to do the same in self-defence. I'm quite as clever as you are, though it doesn't suit me to show it."

"Then you're a fool," said John, in the free manner encouraged between them. "You may like to settle yourself down among a lot of kids, but I don't. If you hadn't given me that rotten advice about pretending to know less than I do, I shouldn't be where I am now."

"I thought you did that because you wanted to score off Parker," said Diana. She was a girl of about John's age, amusing and clever in many ways, but with a constitutional inability to learn lessons.

"I hate Parker," said John shortly.

"Then why do you put it down to me?" asked Bridgit. "You're spoiling the show, always soar-

ing up to the top of the form, and sapping away at prep as if it really mattered."

"It does matter," said John. "I'm going to show Parker up. Miss Wetherall asked me only this morning how it was that I was in the Third, while Jane was in the Second."

"What did you reply?" asked Diana.

"I told her to ask Parker."

"That's the right spirit. Give them a bone to pick together."

"I'm not sure that I approve of this devotion to your form-mistress," said Bridgit. "You break into a fatuous smile when the girl addresses you."

"I don't," said John indignantly.

"Yes, you do," said Diana. "I've noticed it too. You're beginning to be the victim of a secret pash. I had one myself for Miss Beal when I first came. I know the signs."

Bridgit laughed at this. Miss Beal was plain and angular, and would never see thirty-one again.

John didn't laugh. Diana had hit the target. It had never happened to John before to admire intensely a girl older than herself, and she didn't know that such admirations are common among

schoolgirls. She was dismayed that the devotion which she had hardly yet acknowledged to Jane had already become patent to Bridgit and Diana.

"She's a good sort," she said in an offhand manner, "and I like her the best of any of them. But I shall be jolly glad to get out of her old form all the same." This must surely put them off the scent. "Besides," she added, "she lives near us at home."

"Oh, I didn't know she was a Kangaroo."

"I mean in Suffolk. Her father is a clergyman near Yaxenham, and he knows my uncle."

"Oh, well, of course if the male parent of the schoolmistress knows the brother of the father of the pupil that accounts for the silly simper."

"Perhaps it isn't a bad idea to be the model of the form," said Bridgit. "It will make Parker look thoroughly foolish to have stuck you down there if you're always at the top of it, especially if you can persuade Jane to keep always at the bottom of the Second."

"That's where she always is, poor lamb! She does her best, and I help her sometimes; but it's too difficult for her."

XI

IT may be supposed that Miss Parker was not blind to the situation that she had created.

John was reported to her by Miss Wetherall as one of the best girls in her form, who worked harder than any of them, while it was obvious that Jane was overweighted. She worked well too, but she hadn't John's capacity behind her. This was coming out for the first time, but to those who knew nothing of their previous history it looked as if it should have been plain from the first.

Miss Parker was in a quandary. It had seemed a perfectly natural retort to John's impertinence to say that she must stay where she was until she had proved that she deserved to be moved up. And there would have been nothing against it if she hadn't made the mistake at the beginning of rating Jane's abilities too high. That had happened once or twice before, and a girl who was outclassed had been moved down to a lower form at half-term, to the relief of herself and every one concerned. It was

what the rare mid-term moves were for, to read-just matters, nearly always for new girls. For they came to her at all ages and in all states of knowledge, or ignorance, and it was never easy to put them in exactly the right place at first. If John and Jane had not been sisters she would have moved one up and the other down at half-term, and it would have seemed to everybody the right arrangement. But how could she take that course without giving John a triumph over her? It was bad enough as it was.

Indeed, it was so bad that she soon woke up to the necessity of doing something at once, without waiting for half-term. She could not accuse herself of having acted simply from an impulse of annoyance, though it would have been far better if she had not allowed annoyance to enter into it at all. It would have been manifestly absurd to set a girl to lower tasks than she was capable of performing merely as a punishment. But that was exactly how it looked now, for she knew that the whole school had the story of what had happened, and had it as John chose to present it.

It was upsetting everything. She was aware of a growing body of girls who were adversely criticizing

her, and withholding their confidence, and their liking for her. In her varied make-up of character vanity played some part, and it was displeasing to her not to be looked up to with universal respect, and not to be held, as she wished to be held, as one who was more a friend to her girls than a mistress. That was the note that she desired to fix upon her school, into whatever dimensions it might grow. She looked forward to a time when she would teach very little herself, but would always be there for encouragement and advice—the wise sympathetic head, somewhat aloof, but to whom every girl would turn naturally in all the little troubles that beset girlhood, and leave the school for ever blessing the name of the woman who had guided her through her early years.

She took herself to task. John was not the first girl she had had who was “difficult.” Some of them had remained difficult always, others had yielded to kind and sympathetic treatment. She had not meant to drive John into resentful opposition, but only to put her on probation, and she had taken some little pains since to show her that she need not consider herself under a ban. But John had received her graciousness with as near an approach to rudeness as

would escape censure, and was evidently harbouring the most bitter resentment. And it had to be admitted that she had some grounds for it. Here she was, by the report of her form-mistress, working as hard as any girl in the school, and it was actually not open to Miss Parker to congratulate her upon it, and to encourage her to continued effort.

She held counsel with Miss Beal, who took a mathematically precise view of the situation. "She's a thoroughly ill-conditioned girl," said Miss Beal. "She is working like that simply and solely to put you in the wrong. If you moved her up to-morrow she would probably leave off working altogether. You are *not* in the wrong. She is in her proper place in the Third, where there are others quite as good as she. In fact, if you move her up at half-term you ought to move up three or four others as well, or you will be showing her a special favour which she hasn't deserved."

This was comforting to Miss Parker's self-respect. "It would be perfectly all right," she said, "if I hadn't put the younger sister in a higher form."

"Well, that was a mistake, as it turns out. But the two things have nothing to do with each other. The

best thing you can do is to move the younger one down, and, if I may advise, you will do it at once. Then all the talk, which is doing a lot of harm, will be stopped."

"I am afraid it would make still more talk. They would say that—"

"What does it matter what they say," interrupted Miss Beal, who was a very downright person, "as long as you do the right thing? The younger one is a nice child, and is doing her best, but we overrated her capacity. Believe me, that will be the best solution, and if the elder continues to do well, you can move her up at half-term, as you promised you would."

"Perhaps it will be the best way," said Miss Parker, "though, whatever I do it will seem as if I were giving in to her. However, I shall have a little talk with her first, and see if I can bring her into a better frame of mind. She is doing a lot of harm in the school at present."

"Yes, she is," said Miss Beal. "And she's not the only one. My Lady Bridgit is nearly as bad as she is, and they back each other up."

But Miss Parker was not yet ready to accept criti-

cism of Bridgit. "I shall talk to her too," she said. "I owe it to her parents, who are very old friends of mine."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Beal.



XII

JOHN had made friends with little Miss Robinson—Robby, as she was generally called by the school, who quite liked her, but didn't treat her as they did the other mistresses. Among the older girls there was nobody of any standing who sought out her company, as they did that of Miss Wetherall, for instance, and were proud to be seen going about arm in arm with her. Girls who didn't amount to much in the general estimation hung about with her sometimes, but she received more patronage than friendship, and among the little ones whom she taught discipline was not well maintained. Hardly a day passed but she threatened to tell Miss Parker of one or another of them, but the threat was entirely disregarded, because it was known that she would be not less frightened at going up before Miss Parker than they were. It had happened before that she had made a complaint, and Miss Parker, looking into it, had found that there were faults on both sides, and distributed her blame equally.

John had seen for herself the outrageous way in which Miss Parker treated the poor little thing, and was full of pity for her in her menial position, and for the private troubles at which Bridgit had hinted. What she wanted was a real friend, in whom she could confide, one who would put courage into her to resist the worst of the indignities to which she was subjected.

In the early days, when she and Bridgit were undergoing their novitiate, and were inclined to be popular in the school, because of their independence and their amusing qualities, it seemed to John that she would only have to set a fashion to get it generally followed. If *she* took up the cause of the oppressed Robby she would gain in dignity, and Miss Parker would be shamed into treating her better. Jane, who also thrilled with sympathetic indignation at Robby's woes, as recounted to her by John, was quite willing to make a friend of her too. Bridgit, when pressed by John, said she was sorry for Robby, but she bored her. However, anything for a quiet life! She would walk round the garden with her in the sight of all twice a week, and if that didn't do the trick it wouldn't be her fault. Diana

refused point-blank to join the ranks of the Robby-ites. "It's only people like Vera Hopping and Gladys Hart who make a friend of her among the older girls," she said, "and that's because they're such worms that nobody else wants them. You don't know about these things yet. I should find some other way of annoying Parker, if I were you."

But John was firm in her purpose. It wasn't, after all, with the idea of annoying Parker that she was espousing Robby's cause. Shaming her into decent behaviour was another thing, but even that wasn't the chief thing. It was because she was sorry for Robby herself, with her invalid mother from whom she was compelled to be parted, that she was going to take her up and put heart into her. It was significant of the degraded state in which Robby lived that John had heard even kind old Mrs. Dent summon her to go through the linen cupboards with her, not rudely, of course, but in just such a way as the house-keeper at Yaxenham would call one of the house-maids to some domestic task. All that must be altered, and Robby—Miss Robinson—instated into her proper position as one of the assistant mistresses of the school, and not as a household drudge.

Robby did not take kindly to Bridgit's offhand overtures, was inclined to shirk the honour of her companionship, and, when she could not wriggle out of it on the plea of having something else to do, showed herself nervous and utterly uninteresting. With John it was different, and after a time she sought her society rather than let herself be sought. John's sympathy was real, though its source may not have been entirely unmixed. She encouraged Robby to talk about her home and her mother, and responded with disclosures of her own. It was even a little comforting to have somebody to whom she could talk sometimes about her own mother. She did not do this in any way that would have encouraged sympathy with her in her sorrow; Robby was not the sort of person from whom she could have stood that. But she was the first person to whom she found it possible to mention her mother naturally, without an overpowering sense of her loss, and she felt instinctively that it would be good for her to be able to do that more frequently, and with others.

Robby proved herself a simple ineffective little soul, who was glad enough to be made a friend of

by somebody who counted for more than she did, even by some one so much younger than herself as John. She talked quite a lot when she found that her conversation was welcome, and John grew rather tired of her prattle, though she wouldn't admit it to herself, for she was upheld by her own good intentions, and in order to justify herself saw nothing but what was good in Robby. One thing she respected her for; she would never listen to a word against Miss Parker without protesting. John thought that this was partly because she was afraid of her, but she recognized the loyalty in it too, and thought it was one of Robby's best points.

One Sunday afternoon Robby appeared in a lace blouse, which John thought she recognized as the one she had been altering for Miss Parker on the morning of the examination. Yes, said Robby, it was the one. Miss Parker had given it to her, and a very handsome present it was. Didn't John think she looked very smart in it? Miss Parker often gave her things that she didn't want any longer, and she sent her mother things too. She was really very kind, and John ought not to be so much up against her.

"I've reason to be," said John. "Were you altering it for her or for yourself?"

"Well, she didn't actually give it me until after I had made the alterations," said Robby. "But I feel sure she meant to all the time."

"Oh, well, I don't," said John. "What happened was that you had made such a botch of it that she didn't want to wear it any longer and handed it over to you." Which wasn't, if you come to think of it, *quite* the way to talk to a mistress whom she was training to be respected by the whole school.



XIII

ONE morning John woke up at a quarter to six, as she had instructed herself to do; for she had been told that if you said to yourself quite firmly just before you went to sleep: "I must wake up at such and such an hour," a sort of mental alarm clock inside you saw to it that you did wake up precisely at that hour; and she had found that it was so.

She and Jane slept with their window open and the blind up, and there was the sun shining straight into their room across a path of golden light on the sea, which was calm and still. She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, got up and went to the window. How lovely it was in the early morning, with the air so fresh and sweet and all the birds singing in chorus! There was something to be said for England after all, when it was like this. The premature summer weather which sometimes comes in May had held for some days now, and there had been constant talk of bathing, though the sea was still very cold.

John was eager for the bathing to begin. She and Jane had plashed about in the lagoon at Wallaroo from their babyhood, and later on in those hot Australian summers they had gone in perhaps half a dozen times a day, whenever they had wanted to cool off. They were both expert swimmers and divers, and John thought they must be better at it than English girls, who, as far as she could learn, had their opportunities for a few months in the year, and then only if they happened to be by the sea.

She wanted to prove herself better than they were at something, for it was disturbing her to find that the estimation in which she was held by her school-fellows was steadily declining. Lawn tennis was the only outdoor game that was played at St. Hilda's in the summer. Miss Waring, one of the younger mistresses, had played at Wimbledon, and took great pains in coaching promising players. To get into the Tennis Six at St. Hilda's was an honour as keenly sought as membership of the Eleven at a boys' school, and the cerise ribbon which indicated this honour greatly exalted its wearer. The school thought they could beat any other girls' school in the country, or out of it, and they had actually beaten

all the schools within reach for three years running, though some of them had three or four times the number to draw from. Tennis was enthusiastically discussed at all times, and most diligently practised; and every girl who had it in her to excel was watched and fostered.

Both John and Jane had an innate capacity for games, but they had played tennis very little, and knew next to nothing about its science. Jane was coming on because she was among the young ones who were worth taking trouble about; but John was considered too old to make anything of. She had to learn everything for herself, and did not find it always easy even to get a game. It was understood that girls who were out of the running should give way to those whom practice and tuition would benefit, to the advantage of the school. This cut across the ordinary rules for the use of the courts, of which there weren't enough for everybody, but the whole school was so keen that nobody grumbled at being asked, always politely, and generally by Miss Waring or the Captain of the Six, to give way.

Once in the first week, when John still had hopes of distinguishing herself, she was playing with

Bridgit and Diana and another girl, and was so much on her form that when Jean Wallace, Captain of the Six, came up to their court and stood watching until they had finished the game, she thought it was because she was proving herself a player worth taking notice of, especially as some of her strokes were applauded. But when Jean Wallace said: "Would you mind awfully letting us have the court?" which was the formula in use, she grew suddenly angry, and said: "I don't see why we should. We put our names down for it."

"And we're thoroughly enjoying our game," said Bridgit, always ready to resist authority.

Jean said: "Oh, of course you've a perfect right to keep it if you want to," and walked away with her head in the air.

"Now you've done it," said Diana, and Margaret Croall, the fourth girl, showed herself much disturbed at the refusal. And with reason, for it went all round the school that John had refused to give up a court when she had been asked to do so by the Captain of the Six, and she was made to feel that she had committed a heinous fault.

It was the beginning of her unpopularity. None

of the better players ever asked her to make up a four after that, and of course she couldn't ask them. She was thrown more completely into the society of the very few girls of her own age who were content to remain outside the main stream of the interests of the school, and Bridgit and Diana were the only two among those who were really capable of counting for anything at all. Whatever court she played on was ostentatiously ignored by all the rest, and they returned her balls which had strayed into other courts in silence, as if they didn't want to have anything to do with what belonged to her.

So she had given up all hopes of excelling at tennis, and didn't care about playing now, for it emphasized the unpopularity that she felt descending upon her. But she was beginning to cherish strong hopes of her swimming and diving, when the time should come for their exercise. She had heard about the Otter Club, to which girls who showed aquatic prowess were elected. If she could get into that, her standing would be recognized, and she thought that she would have no difficulty in making friends among the many nice girls who were higher in the school than she was, but not older, and towards some of

whom she was attracted, though as yet none of them showed themselves attracted towards her.

She felt rather sad as she stood at the window and looked out over the sea. The sea had had a curious effect upon her at first, as she had thought of the thousands of miles of it that separated her from her home; and she had pictured herself sailing and sailing on it, half round the world, until at last she came home. She had thought it might be something like that when she died, and she would sail and sail on a calm sea of blue and silver until she touched a shore of sand, all gold, and found her mother waiting there for her.

But the new interests in which she was involved had driven out the homesickness now, and it was as a vast swimming-bath in which she was to try her prowess for the first time that day, that the sea appeared to her at that moment. Her sadness was because she seemed to have missed her way in this society of girls with whom she could have been so happy if she hadn't got out of gear with them. She wasn't thinking it over carefully at that moment. She had hardly yet attained to the power of thinking anything over carefully. She had been for some

days obsessed with this idea of membership of the Otter Club, which was to put everything right for her. And her chance of showing what she could do would come that morning, as the weather evidently meant to remain on its good behaviour. She was excited about it, but the sadness was there underneath all the time.

Jane was fast asleep. She looked at her lying there, with her child's face, and the thick plait of her hair astray on the pillow, and an access of tenderness came over her. She did love her darling little Jane, and wanted to help and protect her. She was going to wake her up in a quarter of an hour, after she had gone through her own "repetition," and help her with her Latin, which was Jane's chief stumbling-block. She wasn't thinking of her own lower place in the school, which kept her in such a constant state of irritation. She wasn't thinking of herself at all, but only of Jane, who was trying so hard, and getting on in the school so much better than she was. She was entirely without jealousy at that moment, almost as if she were standing outside of it all, and watching Jane's progress with sisterly pride.

John was growing fast in her capacity for school

work. She had accustomed herself to concentrate upon it, and was finding it more and more interesting to get over difficulties for herself. It seemed to her that the work Jane was doing in the Second was well within her own powers, though it was becoming more and more evident that it was beyond Jane's. She went over Jane's lesson with her almost as if she were a mistress with a pupil, and Jane seemed glad enough to have it so, and made no complaint of her bossiness, as she had been used to do in the old days.

Jane was in an affectionate, almost clinging mood this morning. She was sleepy, and leant her head against John's shoulder; and she had to be continually goaded into taking pains about what she was doing. "You *must* do your best and get on," John said to her. "I've found out for myself that it's worth doing, and you like school much better if you work as hard as you can. *You must too.*"

"Oh, I do," said Jane. "If you were only in the Second too, darling, I should get on much better. It will be lovely when you do come there, and we can do it all together."

"She promised to move me up at half-term," said John, referring to Miss Parker, whom she never called anything but "she" to Jane, "and I don't see



They were just finishing, when the door opened, and Miss Prout appeared on the threshold, in a state of undress, and wearing her most severe expression.

how she can help it, though I dare say she'd like not to. But I'm quite happy where I am for the present. I like Miss Wetherall much better than I shall like Miss Prout."

"She's not so bad," said Jane, "as long as she knows you're trying. It's a great score for me to be in the Second, though I suppose she wouldn't have put me there if she'd known. It was beastly of her to put you in the Third, but—"

"Oh, well, we won't talk about that," John interrupted her. "I bet she's sorry she did now. Just go over this once more, and then you can go to sleep till the bell rings. We're going to bathe to-day. Hurrah!"

They were just finishing, when the door opened, and Miss Prout, who slept in the next room to theirs, appeared on the threshold, in a state of undress, but wearing her most severe expression.

"I have heard you talking for the last half hour," she said. Then her eyes fell on their books. "Don't you know that it isn't allowed to bring school books into bedrooms? I shall report you to Miss Parker."

Then she left them, to resume her interrupted slumbers.

XIV

IT was Jane who was first called in to Miss Parker, just before the eleven o'clock interval. John had heard from a girl in the Third that she had been sent for, and waited where she could catch her coming out.

When Jane did come out, and saw her there, she burst into tears. "She has put me down into the Third," she said. "It's *too* bad, when I was trying all I could."

"Oh, how I hate her!" said John, with her fists clenched. She kissed Jane, as there was no one within sight, and said: "Never mind, darling. We shall be together anyhow."

"That's some consolation," said Jane, drying her eyes, "but I hate going down all the same. Oh, I forgot; you're to go in to her. Don't be rude to her because of me. I don't *really* mind."

John knew that she did mind very much, but the warning had some slight effect upon her. It wouldn't be of the slightest use to tell Miss Parker

in plain language exactly what she thought of her, the inclination to which had come upon her with redoubled force under this new blow dealt to her through Jane. She would let her see it, though, while controlling her resentment and antagonism, and make her thoroughly ashamed of herself, if she had it in her to feel shame over anything but the size of her nose.

Miss Parker looked rather pleased with herself than otherwise, as she sat at her desk, beside which girls who were summoned to her presence stood while she talked to them. The time had come to adjust matters, and this infraction of a rule, which she was not prepared to take seriously, considering its laudable object, gave her the opportunity of doing so. She had talked kindly to Jane, and told her that she was pleased with the way she had worked, but it was evident that the work was too hard for her, or she wouldn't have had to spend time over it out of the appointed hours. Growing girls must have their full hours of sleep, which was why she had made the rule that had been broken. She was going to put her down into the Second Form, where she really ought to have been from the first. She would

find the work quite within her capacity there, and wouldn't be tempted to break rules in preparing it.

Jane had accepted her decision without protest, and she had no idea that she considered herself to be harmfully degraded. She would talk kindly to John too, and see if she couldn't clear away that cloud that lay over her, and was spoiling the early days of her school life. She had come fully to see that there was some reason for it. John had proved herself to be considerably better at school work than Jane, as she had claimed to be, and it must be keeping her in a constant state of resentment to be in a lower form than a sister two years younger than herself. That was being put right now. She would go as far as she could in acknowledging that a mistake had been made, and if the girl had any generosity in her, as most girls had, she would accept the gracious gesture, and lay aside her own ungraciousness, which had been so marked as to cause Miss Parker some disturbance of mind.

John came in, with a very black look on her face. There was no doubt that she was one of the difficult ones, but it would be all the more credit to bring her into a right frame of mind.

Miss Parker affected to take no notice of the black look, and said: "Well, Myee, I am getting nothing but good reports of your school work. I wish you hadn't led me into doing you some injustice at the beginning, but it is always rather difficult to put new girls into the right places, and if they don't help you themselves, you know—"

She broke off and looked at her with a smile, to which there was no response, and hastened to say: "But we will forget all about that now. I am pleased with the way you have worked, and shall certainly move you up to Second Form at mid-term, if you go on doing as well as you have been doing. But you must not let your zeal lead you into breaking rules, you know." Here she repeated what she had said to Jane about growing girls and their hours of sleep. "There ought to be no difficulty in preparing your lessons for Third Form in the time allowed for preparation. It will be harder in Second, but even then you must not take books into your bedroom. Accustom yourself to concentrate in the hours of work, and you will find you won't want to."

This speech was not without its effect. There was no lack of generosity in John's nature, and, but

for the memory of Jane's tears, she would have given Miss Parker the benefit of the doubt, and taken it that she was trying to be "decent." But what was the good of this soft-sawder, if it was to end in some such sentence as had been pronounced upon Jane? A lot of it was only pretence too. They would at least have it straight first, and then see what it did mean.

"I wasn't doing my own work, Miss Parker," she said. "I was helping my sister with hers."

This struck Miss Parker disagreeably. She had cleared Jane's affair out of the way, and didn't want John's to be complicated by it. Besides, it emphasized the invidious position in which John had undoubtedly been placed, to have a girl in the Third helping a girl in the Second over her lessons. She was not quite prepared to admit her own mistake so far as to accept that as a natural proceeding, and John was showing herself ungracious in pinning her to it.

She bethought herself for a moment. She wanted to set things right, for herself and John too. She might have to go a little farther in acknowledging herself to have made a mistake, or two mistakes, at

the beginning; and at least she would not show offence at John's pressing the advantage she had over her.

But the short pause was fatal, for John misunderstood it. It had not occurred to her that in the few seconds Miss Prout had been in their room she could not have discerned that it was Jane's lesson that they were both doing, or that Miss Parker did not know it. She thought she was considering how she could keep up her pretence. And she had time to return to her indignation at what she looked upon as Jane's punishment.

"I think it is very unfair," she said, "to put my sister down, when she has tried so hard." She didn't say, "Miss Parker." It was one woman to another. If she took that properly, and acknowledged that it *was* unfair, then she was ready to come to terms with her, since in her blundering way she did seem to be trying to be decent.

But Miss Parker couldn't stand that. She was conscious of nothing but of having benefited Jane, and here was this cross-grained impertinent girl actually manufacturing a new offence out of that!

There was no doing anything with her on reasonable lines.

“I will not allow you to speak to me like that,” she said. “And if you cannot learn to behave with ordinary respect, and take your place with the rest, I shall think very seriously whether I shall keep you in the school at all. I had no intention of punishing you for breaking a rule, but I cannot overlook this continued rudeness. Bathing is to commence to-day, but you are not to go down to the sea, or outside the garden for another week.”

“Thank you, Miss Parker,” said John, as she left her.

XV

WHEN John got outside Miss Parker's room she laughed. She was a little surprised that instead of feeling absolutely furious at being denied her bathing, the prospect of which had so filled her mind, she should be rather amused at it. But it was so, though no doubt she would feel angry at this new injustice by and by.

It was as if some release had come to her. She had been willing to overlook Miss Parker's faults, and adjust herself to the task of becoming a normal English schoolgirl, which included a reticent and respectful attitude towards your schoolmistress. But that was all over now. There was nothing to be done with a woman like that, who was incapable of meeting you half way, and could only deal out vindictive and irrational punishment for whatever it didn't suit her to listen to from you. What had bathing, or not bathing, to do with being rude? It was really too silly. Besides, she hadn't been rude,

but only straightforward, which was evidently what "she" couldn't stand.

Well, all right! She wouldn't take the trouble to quarrel with the woman any more. She was a person she didn't like, but had to put up with. As long as she wasn't given any more handles, she supposed she would let her alone now. She would have as little to do with her as possible, and would enjoy her life with a greater freedom than heretofore. She had had the better of the late interview, and wasn't feeling any particular grievance at the moment. She was even prepared to do "her" some justice in the matter of Jane's move down. It seemed that really it had not been intended as a punishment, and there was something to be said for that idea of growing girls getting enough sleep. She and Jane would be in the same form now, and she would make much of that to Jane, and help her over her disappointment. As for either of them doing more work now than they were obliged—"she" wouldn't have to complain of that any more.

Here John laughed again, but then remembered Miss Wetherall. Oh, well, she would do what she could do to please *her*. How perfectly sweet she was,

with her goldy brown wavy hair, and that little singing note in her voice! She always addressed her as Myee, never as Myee Aubrey. Myee! She was the only person that John liked to hear the name from. She said it to herself, as Miss Wetherall said it, and it was music in her ears.

She joined up with Bridgit after school and told her all about it. The sense of a new-found freedom remained by her, but there was one consideration that had occurred to her during the last hour in school which gave her some concern. "She" had threatened to send her away.

But Bridgit laughed away her fears on that score. "It's the last thing she'll do, my dear, unless you actually make her. Of course, if you were to pull her nose before the whole school, I suppose you'd have to go. But do you think she's going to lose your money if she can help it? Not much! Why, you're pure profit to her. She has put two of you in a room that only holds one, and do you think she sends the extra proceeds to the Missionaries? She does not. She snaffles them. Oh, I know my Parker. Don't you worry yourself."

So John ceased to worry herself. She and Bridgit

hung over the wall, and watched the shivering school take to the chilly sea. Bridgit had declined to go in until it grew warmer. "It's a fetish," she said. "How many of them do you think really like it? Not one, but they haven't the pluck to say so. I say, isn't it jolly, Irene? That mauve tint just suits you, my dear. Do go in and play the flounder again. We love watching you."

John had an idea that Bridgit had excused herself from bathing for the sake of keeping her company; for she was at least as capable as the rest of enduring hardship for the sake of something worth while. Her home in Ireland was on the sea, and she had been almost as enthusiastic as John in looking forward to the bathing, but not quite, because her pose was not to be enthusiastic about anything, and only talk of horse and hound could really rouse her. She was probably the only one of those who had excused themselves who would rather have been bathing than not, and John felt grateful to her, but knew better than to thank her.

They were the only two who were watching. The rest were on the tennis courts. It was a glorious day, and it was only the sea that hadn't yet warmed

up to its summer temperature. Miss Parker was down on the sands, but out of hearing, and Miss Wetherall and some of the younger mistresses were bathing. There was plenty of fun in it. Some of them had conquered their repugnance to the cold, and were racing one another, or diving off the spring-board, with the zest of young sea animals. John kept her attention upon those who wore the cerise-bound dress of the Otter Club. There were only four of them, for those who had been the most prominent members the summer before had left the school.

They were certainly good at it, but not better than she was, and one of them wasn't so good, and never got her dive clean. It was Jean Wallace, who had probably been elected on her general standing in the school rather than for any special aquatic ability. John discovered that she wasn't quite so keen on it as she had been. She still wanted to belong, and hoped that she would; but it was just a club among the girls themselves, not like the Tennis Six, which was a school affair of the utmost importance. The members of it didn't wear the ribbon, which the girls in the Hockey Eleven wore, as well as the girls in the Tennis Six, and there were no contests with other

schools. She could afford to wait until her week's embargo was lifted, and there would be plenty of time to show what she could do then.

Anyhow, she wasn't going to give "her" the pleasure of seeing her upset by her silly punishment. She knew that she must be aware of them hanging over the wall and making fun of it all. That would be gall and wormwood to her. Oh, she knew her Parker now, as well as Bridgit did. What a woman to be at the head of a school!



XVI

A GREAT idea came to John. That poor little Robby! She flattered herself that she had effected some improvement in her hard lot, but she could never really be happy apart from her mother. John had formed the opinion that Mrs. Robinson must be rather a silly old person, something after the style of Robby herself, and even more so, because she was older. But it made it all the more pathetic that Robby should so cling to her, even to the extent of always wanting to talk about her, though there was nothing really interesting to tell. People were not less deserving of pity and affection because they were uninteresting. Robby herself was a case in point. John felt just as sorry for her, and as well disposed towards her, now she knew her thoroughly and had found that there wasn't much to know, as before she had become rather bored with her conversation. Robby wasn't really up to the society of ordinary people with lively brains. Bridgit had "chucked her" long ago, and John had only kept

on out of a sense of responsibility. It was only with a person of her own sort that Robby could be thoroughly happy and at home, and it was too bad that she should be parted from her mother, the person with whom she was most happy and at home.

John imparted her idea to Jane. "Supposing we were to subscribe and give Robby the money to get her mother down here for a week, or even a fortnight. I don't suppose it would cost more than five or six pounds, including the railway fare—and of course she'd have to have a taxi at each end. We've got plenty, and it would be nice to do a kindness with some of it."

"I was thinking of doing a kindness to ourselves," said Jane. "We might pay for riding. It only costs three guineas a term for each."

This was a new idea to John. Half a dozen girls went out once a week with a riding-master, and she and Jane had discussed whether it would be possible to ask Aunt Eleanor if they might join them. But they hadn't liked to, and afterwards Bridgit had laughed at the idea of horsewomen like themselves joining that bunched up cavalcade, which trotted out under the care of the riding-master, who had been a

cavalry instructor, and trotted back again. But to find herself on a horse once more, even on one of those tame screws! "That's not a bad notion," she said. "It's all very well for Bridgit. She'll have something to ride directly she gets home; but we shan't. I don't suppose Aunt Eleanor would mind, if we said we were going to pay for it ourselves."

"We should have to ask Miss Parker."

"I don't want to ask her anything."

"Well, my dear, we couldn't order our own nags without asking her."

"No, I suppose not. I should think she'd say no just for the sake of saying it, if *I* asked her."

"I shouldn't mind doing it. What do you think?"

"Could we afford to do that and pay for Robby's mother too?"

"I'm not sure about paying for Robby's old mother."

"Why not?"

"Well, she might not like to take it from us."

"Oh, I've thought of all that. It's to be a dead secret. She's to send her the money and say it comes from a friend, or two friends, if you'll come in."

"Oh, of course I'll come in, if you do. But people

would guess it was you because you've been so kind to Robby."

"Not kinder than you have. But nobody will know. Can't Robby's mother come and stay at the seaside for a week, without people asking who paid for her?"

"Yes, I see. I suppose Robby wouldn't mind taking it."

"Oh, I can make Robby do anything I like. I don't think I shall ask Parker about riding, and if you asked her for both of us she'd be sure to say I ought to have come too. It's just the sort of thing she'd take hold of. I should think she'd stop me cleaning my teeth for not asking her, or for asking her, whichever it was. I should like to feel myself on a horse again, but I'm very keen on this Robby stunt, and I'd rather spend money on that than on something for myself. Still, I don't see why you shouldn't ride."

"I shan't if you don't. At least, not this term, when there's bathing. We might next term. We could write and ask Daddy, and there would be time to get an answer."

"Yes, that will be best, and just tell Parker that

he says we are to. I don't want to miss any bathing either, now she has kindly let me do it. I think I shall give Robby four pounds, and if you could spare two—"

"Oh, I'll give as much as you."

"I don't see why you should, darling."

"Oh, I shall. I think it's a jolly good idea. Besides, I want to see Robby's old mother."

"Well, it's very sweet of you. But I do think it's worth it. I'll tell her this morning. You had better be there too, to see how pleased she'll be."

"Oh, I don't think I will. She might not like taking a tip from me; she wouldn't mind from you."

Jane had nice feelings. So had John, but she was apt to get carried away by her ideas. Jane's carefulness made John careful to put it tactfully to Robby, and make it look as if she would be doing *them* a favour by accepting their present.

"Besides, it isn't really for you, it's for your mother," John said. "I'm sure it would do her a great deal of good to have a fortnight by the sea."

"Yes, I'm sure it would," said Robby. "I think it's one of the kindest things I've ever heard of, and could only be done by a real *friend*. I'm sure you'll

like mother, Myee. She is very bright in her talk, and she would talk a lot to a friend of mine. I'll take you to tea with her, if she does come, and it will be great fun knowing that— Why, it will really be you who will be paying for the tea, and mother won't know it, and will press you to take another cup. It will be awfully funny—good enough for 'Punch.' Well, my dear, I *will* accept it, for mother's sake, and very grateful too. I'm sure Miss Parker won't mind if—"

"Good gracious, you're not going to tell *her*."

But Robby said it was absolutely necessary that she should do so, and John couldn't shake her. She felt quite sure that Miss Parker would prevent Robby from accepting, and was vexed with her for standing out. She kept on saying, "Oh, I should have to. Oh, I should have to," and wouldn't listen to anything; which was irritating.

When she saw that she couldn't get her way, John's fertile brain conceived another scheme. "What is your mother's address?" she asked.

"What do you want it for?"

"Oh, because I collect addresses. I've got a book for them."

She laughed as she said it. As long as she didn't actually tell Robby that she was going to write to her mother and send her the money, Robby might know, but she couldn't say anything. Or at least she wouldn't. John could influence her as far as that. "I know you're afraid of Parker," she said, "but I suppose you're not such a worm as to have to tell her that I've asked for your mother's address. That's all that there'd be to tell her, without giving away my secrets, which of course you wouldn't do. Besides, I haven't got any secrets. I'm collecting addresses, as I've told you already. Parker can't stop my bathing for that."

"You are not to call Miss Parker Parker, Myee Aubrey."

"All right, Miss Robinson."

It was really more fun doing it in that way. Bridgit came into it, and helped with the letter, subscribing half a crown to the fund. "It's more than I can afford," she said, "and I shall be sorry for it when the till gets empty later on. But I want to help lift the cloud off Robby's mother's fevered brow, and nobody shall ever say that I don't pay my whack for any lark that I share in."

XVII

ROBBY'S mother wrote back a long chatty letter, gratefully accepting the offer made to her, and promising not to disclose its source, which she said would make it all the more exciting. John didn't tell Robby that she had heard from her, but kept her going with hints, such as: "I shouldn't wonder if some good fortune weren't coming to you soon," or: "I should think if your mother ever happened to come here, she would like to have rooms facing the sea."

John and Bridgit and Jane interviewed several lodging-house keepers, and got a lot of fun out of it. They found some nice clean rooms, not too expensive, in Seaview Terrace. Mrs. Crump, the landlady, said she should be pleased to let them to a friend of such nice young ladies, and would take something off the rent, which however seemed to them fairly high. She said she would be glad if they would pay her for a week in advance, which was the custom, and there was such a run on her

rooms that it made it more satisfactory all round to have it quite fixed.

John promised to bring her the money next day. "I don't suppose there's really a run on her rooms in June," she said, "but we've got to pay it some time, so we may as well pay it now. They're the nicest rooms we've seen."

"I'm sure Robby's mother will like those wax flowers on the table in the window," said Jane, "and there's a Bible underneath them if she wants to read it on Sundays."

"I wouldn't make a bosom friend of Mrs. Crump myself," said Bridgit, "but Mrs. Robby won't mind her being a talkative old fool; it will make it more homelike for her. And she's cleaner than the others, which isn't saying much."

Money now had to be extracted from Mrs. Dent, who wanted reasons for producing so large a sum as six pounds.

"You're a dear old thing," said John, giving her a kiss, "but you mustn't ask questions. It's for a good work. We're not intending to spend it on chocs."

Jane also gave her a kiss. "We shall buy *you* some chocs with some of it because we love you," she said.

"Well, I'm sure it's returned," said Mrs. Dent, taking another one on her own account, for Jane was eminently kissable when she looked and acted like that. "But you mustn't tell any of the others, or they'll say I'm making favourites. It's your own money, and if you want it I must hand it over to you. That's only right. But are you quite sure you're not up to some mischief with it?"

"If doing a kindness to somebody is mischief, we are," said John; "but we can't tell you more than that."

"Very well," said Mrs. Dent, jingling her keys. "But you're a mischievous pair, and I'm not sure I don't love you all the better for it, which is foolish, of me, but I was made like that and can't change at my time of life. Only don't tell any one I said so, or it will get about that I encourage insubordination, which is the last thing I'd do, as the widow of a beneficed clergyman."

The next two days were wet, and it was impossible for them to go down to the town to hand over to Mrs. Crump her "week in advance." And this accident unfortunately brought the kindly scheme to an end, for Mrs. Crump came up to see whether her

money was safe, and the person she applied to was Miss Parker.

It was Bridgit who was sent for, and John, who was with her at the time, had no idea of the cause of the summons. She was away for quite a long time, and when she came back she said: "Well, my dear, it's all up. We shan't see Robby's mother here. Parker has put a stop to it."

It seemed that Bridgit had been recognized. "It's my title," she said. "They're not used to them in this mouldy little place, and I'm a marked man because of it. So is little Pam Crompton, because of hers, and Bonds tried to charge her threepence for two pennyworth of acid drops the other day for calling her 'my lady.' Crump knew me, though she didn't let on. She's an old sneak, and too greedy to live. However, she's been paid out for it this time, because she's lost her let now. You owe that to Parker, John. You'd have had to pay, because you had engaged the rooms; but Parker wouldn't have it. When it comes to a scrap about money she's a match for any old lodging-house keeper."

"Did you tell her it was me who first thought of it?"

"No, of course not. But you bet she knows. I said I wasn't doing much in the money line myself, because I hadn't got any. Some other young friends were putting up the stakes, but I was heart and soul in the scheme. I thought if anybody was to be blamed it might as well be me; it would make up for only subscribing a mouldy half-crown. By the by, I can keep my half crown now, and I'm jolly glad of it. I've had just as much fun out of doing good with it as if I'd paid it down."

"Did she blame you?"

"What, Parker? Oh, no; except for going to the lodging-houses. It seems we ought not to have done that; it isn't allowed. Quite reasonable too. She said you didn't know where girls might get to. However, she wasn't going to say any more about that, as we didn't know—or *I* didn't know. It suited her to put it all on to me, you see, and she evidently isn't going to say anything to you about it at all, or she'd at least have asked who the others were, which of course she knew perfectly well, but pretended she didn't. She kindly explained about Robby's mother. She is undergoing some treatment in London, and I think Parker is paying for it, though she didn't actu-

ally say so. She is going to have her down here to keep Robby company when she goes away for her own holiday. Quite decent of her! Robby's a little ass. She knows her mother has to have her treatment regularly, and it wouldn't be a good thing for her to break it for a fortnight to come here."

"Was Robby there?"

"No. But you bet she's going to be there. I expect she's getting it in the neck at this moment."

"Well, that's too bad! Surely it isn't a crime to want to have her mother with her!"

"Parker's a sort of mother to her in term-time, you see; and naturally she wouldn't want to be bothered with the other one, or with the two of them, if she's anything like Robby. Oh, I can see Parker's point of view all right. She doesn't come so badly out of this, and she said it was a kind thought of mine—of *mine*, you understand—but it would have been better to consult her first. I said I quite saw that now, and I wouldn't ask anybody else's mother to come here without telling her about it. Well, I didn't put it like that, but we were quite pleased with each other at the end. She said she had wanted to have a little talk with me for some time. I ought to try and work

up in the school, and make friends more with the older women, who are all so sensible, and would do me such a lot of good. That was a hit at you, my dear. You're not doing me good. In fact, I think you're leading me astray."

"Oh, of course she'd want to have a hit at me. What did you say?"

"I said I quite saw her point, or words to that effect, and that I hoped she'd come and spend a week with us at Castle Bantry in the holidays."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, Norah always used to ask her to spend a week with them if she showed herself snuffy about anything. I thought I'd try it on, just to see, and it worked well. In fact, it closed the conversation, which I was getting rather tired of."

"Shall you ask her?"

"I shall tell mother to, if she doesn't annoy me in the meantime. But she won't be there when you and Jane come. You needn't be alarmed."

Robby must have got it in the neck, as Bridgit had opined, though she wouldn't tell John what Miss Parker had said to her. She moped about with her eyes redder than ever for the next few days, and

would hardly speak to John. "I ought not to have let you persuade me not to tell Miss Parker," she said, on the only occasion on which the subject was mentioned between them. "It was so ungrateful for everything she has done for mother and me."

"Did you tell her who it was who thought of it?"

"Yes, of course I did. There has been quite enough concealment, and I don't want to have any more of it, thank you."

And that was all the thanks John received. But there was some relief in not having to burden herself any further with the society of silly little Robby.



XVIII

JOHN found that it was agreeable to have plenty of money to spend. She and Jane handed back all but a pound each of what they had drawn from Mrs. Dent's keeping, but that went quickly, and they soon drew more.

Mrs. Dent had been profoundly impressed by what had come to be known in the school as The Robby's Mother Stunt. She said that any girls who could think of spending a handsome sum of money in doing a kindness to others, instead of spending it on themselves, were girls that she would have been proud to have as her own, and she quite understood why they had kept it to themselves, though perhaps it had been a mistake to do so, as things had turned out. Still, nobody had blamed them for that, and the good deed remained. As for the money, she believed in girls spending their money in their own way, as long as they didn't spend it too fast, or make themselves ill by spending too much of it on their insides.

It was the consumption of ices, and strawberries and cream, and other delicacies, that was now depleting the capital sum. Visits to one of two confectioners in the town were allowed at certain times, and John revelled in treating her friends, which she did in the most generous fashion, Jane following suit with hers.

The older girls went for the most part to Voules's on the sea front, the younger to Bond's in the High Street. It was a matter of etiquette. At Voules's you could sit at little tables outside, when it was fine enough, in the style of a foreign café, and there was a holy of holies inside the shop to which it was understood that you did not penetrate unless it was made known to you that your presence among its frequenters would be welcomed. It was called the Kitchen, and to go there regularly of your own accord meant that you were of the elect.

Jane took her place naturally among the younger girls who went to Bond's. She had many friends among them, and her place in the school was well defined. John's wasn't. She belonged to the middle group in age, but had few friends among the older girls, some of whom still looked askance at her,

though her early unpopularity was lessening. She was never invited to the Kitchen. Bridgit was, but she said it was a stuffy little hole, and she preferred being outside. She and John remained fast friends, with Diana as a constant third, and John benefited by the connection, for Bridgit could carry off her independence, and John's caused less offence because of it. The conversation of both of them was amusing to their fellows—or to those of them who didn't object to its flavour of lawlessness, and John's hospitalities were so generous that she was becoming renowned for them. But it would have been unbecoming to offer them to older girls, unless they invited her first, and in any case she was incapable of the crudity of buying her way into popularity. It was just a few of the girls older than herself with whom she would have liked to make friends, but it was still not the best of them who would make friends with her.

The Robby's Mother Stunt had caused general interest when it had got about, and John's inception of it redounded to her credit. To have gone and searched among the lodging-houses was the point that most took the imagination; it was so much *not* what any one who had been longer in the school

would have thought of doing. And Miss Parker's part in the affair was much discussed.

John was known to be almost at daggers drawn with Miss Parker, who had never mentioned the affair to her at all, but only to Bridgit. The more responsible elements of the school did not approve of John's attitude towards the head mistress, but to some it gave a fearful joy and they liked to think that Miss Parker was afraid of tackling John.

It may be imagined that Miss Parker herself was not pleased with this state of affairs, of which she was quite well aware.

John had once more led her into a false position. She had not sent for her at the same time as Bridgit, because Bridgit's name was the only one that Mrs. Crump had mentioned, and she had been given the impression that it was chiefly her affair. Bridgit had not dispelled that impression, and it was really because Miss Parker hadn't wanted to give John the idea that she was displeased with her again that she had ignored her share in it entirely.

And see what had come of that leniency! She had very soon learnt from Robby, who kept nothing from her, the estimation in which she was held by John for

her treatment of that foolish little person, whom John had tried to stir up to revolt against her. What had seemed at first to be a piece of quixotic kindness now appeared to be nothing but an ugly conspiracy to show her up in a false light, and she could not believe that any kindness had entered into it at all, at least on John's part.

And how preposterous it was that her own kindnesses should be turned against her in that way! Robby was a continual thorn in her side, because of her general incompetence, and she would have got rid of her long ago if she had not found out how it stood with her and her mother, and made the useless pair of them her special protégées. She had given Bridgit some idea of how matters really stood, but that would hardly count in John's determination to misrepresent them. Robby had declared that she herself had constantly told John how much she and her mother owed to their benefactress, and in return John had tried to persuade her, not only that they owed her nothing at all but were being badly treated by her. John was no doubt still vilifying her, and she had put it out of her own power to stop it; for having left her out of it at first she couldn't call her

up now and go into it again, nor could she put herself into the position of defending herself, further than by what she had said to Bridgit.

Robby, of course, was of no use at all. "You owe it to me," Miss Parker had said to her, "to correct the false impression you have given of me," and the tearful Robby had promised to do so, but had bungled it as usual. The only result had been that John had cynically thrown her over altogether, now that it was no longer possible to use her for working mischief.

What could she do? Here was a girl who was actively hostile to her, and was influencing others in the same direction. Yet she was giving no offence that could be taken hold of. Miss Parker couldn't have one of those quiet little talks with her by which she had sometimes extracted confidences from difficult girls, and put them in a better frame of mind by the exercise of forbearance and sympathy. There was nothing upon which to base such a talk without going into a matter that was closed, or taking notice of how this girl kept out of her way, while others, far more important in the school than she was, frequently sought her society.

That was the galling thing. John had settled her-

self down, to live her own life, and to be on good terms with Miss Parker was of no importance to her whatever, as long as she didn't get into trouble with her.

Small wonder that Miss Parker was getting to dislike John as much as John disliked her. More so now, for John had no particular grievance against her at the moment, and quite thought she had set matters on a satisfactory footing between them. If Miss Parker left her alone, she would leave *her* alone, and it was all working itself out.

But a schoolmistress can't very well leave a girl who has been committed to her charge alone. Miss Parker was only waiting for her opportunity.

XIX

MEMBERSHIP of the Otter Club was filling up. So far only girls who were fairly high up in the school had been elected. Two of them were in the Second Form, and none had been chosen from the Third. John and Bridgit were the only possible ones, and they were better than any who had been left out so far, and better than some who had been elected. In fact, John was very good indeed, and if it had been entirely a question of the best swimmers and divers she must have earned her right to membership before.

She couldn't be kept out of the informal contests that were always taking place. It was only when the Otter dives were called for, and the members of the club went in one after the other that she and Bridgit had to stand aside. Bridgit didn't always stand aside, but went in after them, at an interval long enough to show that she didn't intend to push herself in where she wasn't wanted, but shorter than was compatible with complete respect for the august body that had preceded her. That was Bridgit's way, and every-

body was amused, especially when she went in spread-eagle, as if she didn't know how to dive at all.

But Bridgit didn't mind whether she was elected to the Otter Club or not. John wanted ardently to be elected, and was once more thinking of it night and day. A few of the older girls with whom she disported herself in the water were friendly with her now. She was quite content to be looked upon with disfavour by Miss Parker, but wanted to stand well with her schoolfellows. She had begun to make her way with them now, and to be made an Otter would help her to retrieve some of her early mistakes.

One afternoon Bridgit said to her: "I've got to go to the Kitchen. Have they asked you?"

"No," said John. "I hope you'll enjoy it. Who has asked you?"

"The Salvin woman."

"Oh!"

Barbara Salvin was Captain of the Otter Club. That meant that Bridgit had been elected and John left out.

"They treat you well," said Bridgit, "out of the Club funds. You can have three ices if you want to, and personally I *shall* want."

"I shall have four, and pay for them myself," said John.

"Ah, you see you're one of the new rich. I'm one of the old poor, and don't mind taking it out of them."

It wasn't quite natural. John couldn't entirely conceal her disappointment, but hoped she wasn't showing jealousy, hoped she wasn't feeling it. There was no doubt of Bridgit's loyalty to her. Perhaps she might have expressed some regret that she was to be elected and John wasn't. But it was not the way of either of them to give expression to their friendship in speech.

She spent an unhappy afternoon. She knew she wasn't going to be elected now. Bridgit would be the last. They would have elected them both together if they hadn't meant to leave her out. It was very unfair. Bridgit had always acknowledged that John was better than she was, and indeed she had proved herself so, and proved herself better than half the members of the club, too. Still, they had a right to do what they liked. She supposed she would get over it. It didn't do to set your heart too much on anything.

When she saw Bridgit again she said: "Well, was it all right?"

"Oh, yes, top-hole," said Bridgit. "I had three of them—Neapolitans, and two cheese-cakes and a lemon-squash besides—a regular blow-out. I must have put half a stone on to my riding-weight."

"But the Otter Club?"

"Oh, I must have made a mistake about that."

"What, you're not a member!"

"No. But I've made a jolly good hole in their finances."

"Didn't they talk about it at all?"

"Oh, they talked about all sorts of things. They were full of talk. Most chatty! I don't know, and of course I'm much too delicate to ask, but I shouldn't be altogether surprised if they meant to elect us both. There's *something* in the wind, anyhow."

She wouldn't give any further particulars, but John's hopes revived. It was curious that they should have asked Bridgit to the Kitchen, if they hadn't elected her already. John had seen that it was all the nine Otters who had entertained her, and that was the way in which new members were received. Perhaps they had just meant to make certain first that

Bridgit wanted to be elected. They would know that there wouldn't be any doubt about John.

The next day she heard what had happened from Eleanor Bridgewater, one of the newly elected members, who was now a friend of hers.

"We told her we had elected her," Eleanor said, "and she asked why we hadn't elected you, too. It was rather cheek, in a way, but of course Bridgit's Bridgit. Barbara told her that girls in the Third were hardly ever elected, and she ought to consider herself jolly lucky. Then she said she wasn't nearly as good as you, and you ought to have been elected first. Barbara was a little annoyed at that, and said we elected whom we liked, and Bridgit said: 'Well, it's either me and my dog or not me at all.' She was funny about it, and nobody really minded; but she said she wouldn't belong unless you did. She's a jolly good pal."

"Yes, she is," said John fervently. "I wouldn't mind not belonging for that."

The expression was obscure, but the feeling evident. "Some of us did want you," said Eleanor, "but—"

She broke off. "Is there any chance of both of us?"

John asked, in a voice as disinterested as she could produce.

"I'm afraid not. We didn't tell Bridgit that there wasn't, but ten is the full number, and two more would make eleven."

John knew that there had been twelve the year before. There was something behind. "Oh, well, if you don't want to tell me!" she said.

Eleanor was one of the two who had been elected from the Second Form. She was almost certain of her place in the Tennis Six too, and was becoming a personage in the school. She was perhaps the most important of those who, as John saw it, didn't like Miss Parker. At any rate, she allowed herself freedom of speech about her, and had not attached herself to the group higher up in the school who kept aloof from John.

"I don't mind telling you," she said, after a short pause. "You're a good sort, and I've always stuck up for you. So has Tom Brown."

"Tom Brown! Why, she hardly ever speaks to me!"

"Well, she's going in for a scholarship, you see, and she doesn't want to get up against Parker—I beg

your pardon, Miss Parker. But she likes you all right, and she told me only yesterday that when she gets her scholarship, if she does, she's going to ask you to the Kitchen, and blow the consequences."

This tribute from a girl of such eminence in the school as Vera Rosehill, called Tom Brown for the obvious reason that the book of that title was the first she had taken from the library, was gratifying to John. "I've always liked the look of her," she said, "and I'm glad she doesn't think I'm poison, as some of them seem to."

"Oh, that's passing off. Next term, when Jean Wallace and others of them have left, and we've all had a shove up, you'll be all right. There were only six to three against making you an Otter this term."

The ratio seemed fairly decisive. "Who were the three?" John asked.

"Tom Brown and me and Peggy Transome. But there were one or two others who wouldn't have minded. Of course, everybody knows you *are* better than Bridgit, and Tom Brown said from the first that it wouldn't be fair to elect her and not you. I say, John, you won't tell anybody I told you this, will you? It's sort of confidential what is done in the

Club; but Barbara asked Parker whether she thought they were bound to elect girls only because they were very good in the water."

"Oh, then of course I owe it to her that I wasn't elected."

"She didn't mention any names."

"As if she wouldn't know at once who it was!"

"Well, I suppose she would. Still, she wouldn't advise her. She said it was a matter entirely for ourselves. It wouldn't be right not to give tennis colours to the best players, but we could do what we liked in the Otters."

"Well, you donkey, that was as good as saying, leave her out. I do love Parker, and she loves me, doesn't she? Well, I don't really mind, if it's because of her. I shan't tell anybody, of course, but I dare say a lot of them will guess. I shall tell Bridgit she must join. It's very sweet of her to stick up for me, and I'm glad she did. But I can stick up for myself, and it won't make any difference that she is an Otter and I'm not."

XX

THAT tendency towards occasional naughtiness which both John and Jane frankly recognized in themselves had not showed itself in either of them so far. Whatever view may be taken of John's behaviour in the various episodes here reported of her—and Miss Parker would certainly have classed them under the general head of naughtiness—they were not inspired by the light-hearted spirit of mischief and adventure which she had not yet quite outgrown. But the time came when it attacked both of them together.

They were looking out over the sea from their bedroom window. It was a lovely night, and the moon shone across a path of gold just as the sun had shone on the morning that they had been caught breaking a rule a month before. John might have taken that as an omen if she had thought of it, but she didn't, and when Jane said: "I'm rather tired of being a good girl. I wish we could think of something naughty to do," the sentiment found an in-



They spoke in whispers and crept into the water and waded out
until it was deep enough to swim.

stant response in her own breast, and she replied, "What can we?"

"Do you remember that night at home, when we got up and bathed in the lagoon?"

The train was laid. A few hours later they crept downstairs, unlocked and unbolted a door with infinite precautions against noise, and stole out into the dewy garden and down to the sea.

How lovely it was, with the moon now high in the sky and the sea so calm that its movement on the sand was only a tiny whisper! They spoke in whispers themselves, and did not take their plunge off the springboard, but crept into the water and waded out until it was deep enough to swim in. Towels and bathing-suits were locked up in the shed, and they dispensed with them. They had pretended to be mermaids on that midnight swim in the lagoon at home, and they pretended to be mermaids now, thus connecting the adventure with home, and excusing themselves for the slight feeling of indelicacy that came over them in bathing with nothing on in a place which, though now quite deserted, retained a flavour of publicity. But it heightened the sense of illicit adventure, and it was wonderful to be so

free in the water, with nothing clinging to their limbs to impede them.

They soon had enough of it. On that stifling night in Australia it had been for the sake of coolness that they had got up and bathed in the lagoon. This English night of June was not even hot, and the sea was still very cold. They had nothing to rub themselves down with either, when they waded out on to the sand, and shivered as they put on their pyjamas, which clung to their wet bodies, and hurried up into the garden, quite ready now for the shelter of their bedroom and the warmth of their beds.

But they were not to reach them just yet. As they came in view of the house, they saw a light in an upstairs room. They halted in the shadow of trees, not daring to go on.

Whose room was it? They had the disturbing idea that it was Miss Parker's, and tried to allot the long row of windows to the rooms they knew of. They couldn't be quite sure, but it was just about where they knew her room to be, fortunately at the other end of the house to theirs. Could it be that she had heard them go out, and was waiting for them to come in again?

Yes, it *was* her room. She stood at the window and looked out. She was brushing her hair. Then she had only just gone up to bed, and must have been downstairs when they had unlocked the door and crept out. Supposing she had heard, and come out and caught them! What an escape!

They dared not move until her light had gone out, and for some time after that. They were shivering with cold now, and crept up to the door before it was quite certain that she was safely asleep. But if she hadn't heard them before, she wasn't likely to hear them now, and they would be more careful than ever to make no noise.

The door was fast locked.

Then they hadn't escaped after all! She had heard them go out, had locked the door after them, and meant to keep them out all night, while she slept peacefully herself, and catch them in the morning.

But that didn't seem very likely, when they came to think of it. She wouldn't have stood at her window just like that, if she had known. It was more probable that she had been sitting up late, and had gone round to look after locks and bolts before she went up to bed.

They breathed relief again. But the relief was short-lived, for if she hadn't locked them out intentionally she had none the less locked them out, and how on earth were they to get in again?

After investigations which suggested nothing, they could only think of staying out until the maids came down in the morning, and begging whichever of them should open the door not to give them away. If it was Jessie, she wouldn't. If it was Clara, she certainly would. The prospect was a bleak one.

So was the temperature now. They had on thin dressing-gowns, but their pyjamas were wet through, and they had stood for nearly half an hour under the trees without moving. "I really don't think I can stay out all night," said Jane, through chattering teeth. "Besides, it's just as likely to be Clara as Jessie, and if we're to be found out we might just as well be found out now as then."

John would have preferred to take the risk for herself, but she was tender for Jane, who wouldn't have given in like that if she could possibly have stood it out. It would be a dreadful thing to rouse the house and deliver themselves up to judgment, and the vengeance that would follow the judgment,

but she did not hesitate. "All right, darling," she said. "We'll go and ring the bell. Let's hope it won't be Parker who'll come down and let us in."

But Jane flinched from this immediate action. "If we could only wake up one of the girls!" she said.

Ah, that was an idea! John's brain flew to meet the suggestion. "Let's throw stones into Bridgit's window," she said.

Bridgit slept alone in a room corresponding to theirs on the floor below. It was removed by nearly the length of the house from Miss Parker's, but was perilously near to it all the same. If "she" were still awake she could hardly help hearing the noise of the gravel stones, only one out of ten or a dozen of which went into the room, the rest striking the wall of the house or with still more noise the glass of the half-open window. Whenever that happened they ran back to the shelter of the trees and waited; but no figure appeared at Miss Parker's window, and presently they would creep out again and renew the bombardment.

Would Bridgit never wake? Her bed was oppo-

site to the window; surely some of the stones must have fallen upon it! "The only chance is to hit her on the face," said John, screwing a fearful excitement out of it.

Jane's efforts were reducing themselves to an occasional weak throw which never went anywhere near the window. "She must be dead," she said, keeping up her courage.

At last Bridgit suddenly appeared at the window. There was a whispered conclave, they crept round to the door, and were presently admitted.

What a relief! And what perils surmounted! But they had had a great scare, and couldn't be sure until the next morning that the escapade wasn't known. Somebody, if not Miss Parker, might have seen or heard them, and the news of it might spread until it reached her scandalized ears.

But the morning passed, and it became evident that the secret was still theirs. They determined to keep it so, Bridgit abetting. "You are both very naughty girls," she said, "and if you ever do it again I shall tell Parker myself. Fancy keeping me out of it! Is that the action of a pal, John Aubrey? Next time I shan't let you in."

"There's not going to be a next time to that," said John. "It wasn't worth it, and I'm going to be a good girl for some time now."



XXI

JANE had caught a bad cold. In the afternoon Mrs. Dent took her temperature and sent her to bed. A little later the blow fell. The escapade had reached Miss Parker's ears after all.

The Vicar of the parish suffered from insomnia, and occasionally took his walks abroad long after his parishioners were all in bed. Or should have been, for on that fine moonlight night, as he walked by the sea, what were those two white forms that met his astonished gaze? Sea-nymphs? Memories of the classics surged up in him, but his orthodoxy was too firmly established to allow him to credit it. Besides, sea-nymphs, if any still survived, would be green. The conviction forced itself upon him that these were not nymphs, except by courtesy, but two of the young ladies of Miss Parker's young ladies' school, especially when they hurried out of the water, as if they were aware of him standing in the shadow of the cliff a hundred yards away, huddled on some-

thing in the way of clothes, and ran up the steps that led to the garden and the house of St. Hilda's.

Should he tell his wife? He thought it was his duty, and did so the next morning. His wife also saw her duty, very plainly, and called upon Miss Parker about tea-time.

It is probable that Miss Parker would have fixed the culprits in her mind immediately. "A tall girl and a younger girl," said the Vicar's wife. "My husband saw as much as that before he averted his eyes and hurried away." Who could it be but John, who alone out of all her girls would commit such a misdemeanour, and her younger sister whom she was leading astray?

But corroboration was not lacking. That morning Miss Parker had accused Clara, the head housemaid, of leaving a door unlocked the night before, and Clara had persisted in saying that she had locked it and remembered doing so. She hadn't believed her, but now she did. It was impossible for her to tell the Vicar's wife that it could not have been girls of hers from whom the Vicar had averted his eyes. For two of them had unlocked a door and gone out, and were actually out when she had relocked the

door herself. How had they got in again? But that could wait. Furthermore, Mrs. Dent had just told her that Jane Aubrey had a bad feverish cold, and it might be as well to send for the doctor, in case of influenza. No wonder Jane Aubrey had a cold!

So there was no doubt of who the culprits were, and it only remained to satisfy the Vicar's wife that full justice should be done, and get rid of her, before proceeding at once to the doing of it.

The Vicar's wife showed a disposition to dwell on the occurrence, and especially upon the absence of what she called decent covering. The Vicar had been as much shocked at this as she had. Miss Parker gave her to understand that she was as much shocked at it as either of them, and finally got rid of her. The Vicar's wife would have liked to be present at the bringing home of guilt, and did throw out a hint that she might be useful in the matter of identification. But she had thrown such stress upon the Vicar's immediately averted gaze that there was no pressing of it, and she had to be content with the prospect of further revelations when Miss Parker had severely dealt with the scandal.

The door was no sooner closed upon her than Miss

Parker sent for John. She wasted no time and no words. "Was it you who was seen bathing in the middle of the night, and running about the shore naked?"

How dreadful it sounded, when put like that. John had no time to defend herself. "Yes, I see it was. I am not going to keep a girl in my school who is capable of behaving in that way. I shall write at once to Lady Aubrey to say that I am going to send you home. In the meantime, you will not mix with the others at all. Wait here, until you are told what you are to do."

That was all; and she went out of the room before John could say a word, if she had had any word to say.

XXII

IT was Clara who was sent to conduct John to her prison, which she did with virtuous indignation. "Such goings on!" she said, with a sniff. "And would have got me into trouble over it too, if you hadn't been found out. I'm glad you was. Well, here you are, and I hope you won't be uncomfortable, I'm sure."

Comfort of body would be provided for. The house was so full that there was no room in which John could have undergone her sentence of seclusion except this one, which Miss Parker kept for the entertainment of her guests. But its modest luxury made it no less a prison. Clara locked the door when she went out, as no doubt she had been instructed to do, and John was left to her thoughts.

Her chief feeling was one of bewilderment at the suddenness of the fate that had come upon her. But that soon gave place to a bleak depression of mind, as it came to her what her sentence would mean. She was to be sent home; and home meant Yaxenham,

and Aunt Eleanor, who did not like her. And it meant being parted from Jane.

She couldn't bear to look farther than that. Miss Parker had been lying in wait for her, and had caught her. She was another person who didn't like her, and the more heavily the punishment fell upon her after she had sent her away, the better she would be pleased.

Clara was evidently to be her gaoler. It was tea-time for the school, and she brought up her tea, and enough of it. She wasn't to be starved then! She managed to make some joke about that, for she wasn't going to give in before Clara, who was still hugging the satisfaction of having been proved right when she had been accused of being wrong. According to her, John was being no more than adequately punished for having nearly got her into trouble.

When she came to take away the tea things she brought what John would want for the night. She was a little more inclined to leniency, and said, "Miss Jane sends her love, and hopes you'll be comfortable. She's getting on all right."

John didn't know that Jane had been put to bed,

and the doctor sent for. She didn't quite understand this message, but Clara enlightened her a little further. "She doesn't know you're here as a punishment," she said. "I wasn't to tell her. I will say that for Miss Parker. She may be 'ard and 'asty, but she's just. She up and said straight out: 'I'm sorry I misjudged you, Clara,' when she found the door 'ad been locked, and it was you who opened it; and I said, 'Granted, I'm sure, Miss,' for I'm not one to bear malice when justice is done."

"What has that got to do with not telling Jane?" asked John. But Clara was too much occupied with her own affair to make the connection plain. "You don't deserve it," she said, "but that's what Miss Parker said to me with her own lips."

Time hung heavy. There were some books in a hanging bookcase. John opened one or two of them, but was too dispirited to read. She wandered about and looked at the pictures and at anything of the smallest interest that the room contained. The window faced the back yard, with a grove of trees beyond it. If only it had opened on to the garden and the sea, she might have found some solace at it. The girls would be in the garden now, before settling

down to the evening's "prep." She could hear voices now and then, but that only made her more unhappy, as she thought of herself cut from the freedom they were enjoying, talking about her, no doubt, and perhaps some of them sorry for her, but not to the extent of spoiling their own satisfactions.

She was to be sent away. She saw nothing beyond that but the dark unknown. Her life was in ruins about her. Whichever way she looked there was no hope of happiness any more. And what had she done to have brought it to this pass? She was still bewildered at the suddenness and enormity of her punishment, and couldn't adjust it to her misdeeds. But resentment against Miss Parker was absent from her thoughts. She was an instrument of fate, almost impersonal.

Was she to be left entirely to herself, to do what she liked, where there was nothing to do, to go to bed when she felt inclined, or to sit up with nobody to blame her for it? That mockery of freedom would be the worst of anything.

But it was not imposed upon her. Miss Wetherall brought up her books, and set her to her preparation.

She did it as if there was nothing more than that in it, and was neither more severe nor kinder than if John's doing her work in a separate room were merely a matter of convenience. But her advent brought emotion with it, and John couldn't let her go without trying for a word of comfort from her.

"Do you think it's so awfully bad what I did?" she asked, with downcast eyes, when she had taken her instructions.

Miss Wetherall's difficulty, to state it in its simplest terms, was that she liked John but didn't like Miss Parker, partly because she thought her incompletely educated. She saw no harm in giving some expression to the liking for a diligent girl who was in trouble, but must on no account allow the dislike to appear.

"Well, I think you were extraordinarily foolish," she said. "You can't do things like that in any school, and expect no notice to be taken of it."

"I know," said John, quite willing to concede this point. "But to be sent away for it!"

Miss Wetherall didn't know she was to be sent away. That was serious.

"My aunt will be frightfully angry," John said, her eyes still downcast.

Miss Wetherall had never spoken to Lady Aubrey, but she had some knowledge of her, enough to make of her no mere abstraction. And from the few talks which she and John had had together she had formed her picture of the two girls, who had lost their mother, and had come to a strange country, and to a lack of sympathy that might weigh hard upon them, severed from their real home just at the age when they most needed it. She suddenly felt very sorry for John. "I don't think you are going to be sent away, my dear," she said kindly.

The relief was so great that John burst into tears, which was a thing she was sorry to have to do before Miss Wetherall, but couldn't avoid.

Miss Wetherall felt uncomfortable. She must not raise hopes only to have them disappointed. "I don't really know," she said. "Miss Parker only told me that you were not to be with the others, but you were to keep on with your work. But perhaps she only meant to give you something to do. Anyhow, you can't do any harm by working at this as well as you

can, and it will take your mind off. Buck up, and set to work."

But the floodgates were opened. John felt immensely sorry for herself now, and clung to any support, or possibility of support. "Couldn't you ask her not to?" she said. "I know I've done things that I ought not to have done, but I've been all right in form, haven't I?"

Miss Wetherall had the idea that Miss Parker had been a little disappointed at the excellent reports John had earned for her form work. But perhaps she had done her an injustice there. No right thinking teacher could look upon the laudable efforts of her pupils with anything but approbation. "You may be sure I shall make the most of that, if I'm asked about it," she said.

"Don't go yet," said John through her tears. "It's so miserable being shut up here."

"Yes, I must," said Miss Wetherall, rising. "I'm taking prep. Besides, Miss Parker might not like me to talk to you about it. But keep your spirit up, Myee. It's never any good losing heart about anything."

She just touched her on the shoulder, which, with the name Myee, so musically uttered, brought comfort.

"Well, if you must go, give my love to Jane, and to Bridgit," John said, with an effort at a smile, "and say I hope to see them again soon."



XXIII

MISS WETHERALL had left behind her no more enlivenment than she could have wished, but less than there was reason for. John clung to her words: "I don't think you are going to be sent away," and ignored the qualifications that had followed that consolatory pronouncement. There was at least still a chance, and she was able to keep her mind off her doom and occupy it with the work that had been set her to do.

She had nearly finished it when her door was unlocked again and Mrs. Dent came in.

Her face was serious, and the kindness which usually sat upon it was not apparent. "It is a quarter to nine," she said, "and you must go to bed. And you are not to have your light on after nine. Oh, why do you do such naughty things, and bring such trouble?"

John's own trouble had lessened under the influence of the work that had been engaging her. She

smiled at Mrs. Dent, and said: "I know I've been awfully naughty, but I shan't be again. *You're* not very angry with me, are you?"

But Mrs. Dent was not in a frame of mind to be deflected by the usual blandishments. "Naughty indeed!" she exclaimed. "I should think so! And the indelicacy of it! I would never have thought that one of my girls could do such a thing."

John was still one of her girls then! "Who saw us?" she asked, disturbed herself at the thought that they had been seen.

"If it had been anybody but a clergyman!" said Mrs. Dent. "What must he think of you? But perhaps it was fortunate that it was. And we must be thankful that he was some way off, and went away at once, as well he might."

"I suppose it sounds rather awful," said John. "But we only just went in and out, and we had no idea that there *could* be anybody there at that time of night."

"Why, it was only just after twelve o'clock! In August there might have been quite a number of people there, let alone one clergyman."

"But it isn't August, dear. Of course we wouldn't have done it if we'd thought of anybody being there, any more than you would."

"Than *I* would!" But Mrs. Dent recoiled from pursuing that suggestion. "Well, it has brought its punishment," she said, "and I'm sure I've no wish to make it worse. Go to bed now, and try to forget it, if you can, till to-morrow."

"Am I really to be sent away?"

"Didn't Miss Parker tell you so? You were to go to-morrow, but she felt obliged to give your aunt a day's warning; so you are not to go till Thursday."

John's lately revived spirits sank to zero. "I hoped she might give me another chance," she said.

"No. You've gone too far this time. She can't have your bad influence in the school any longer, and I must say, though I'm sorry for you, that I think she's right. It's leading your little sister into doing wrong that is so bad, when you ought to be the very one to set her a good example. And look what has come of it, poor child!"

"What do you mean? Has anything happened to Jane?"

"Well, you've no cause to alarm yourself, till we see how she gets through the night. I shall be with her, and if her temperature is down by the morning—"

"Is she ill? Why didn't you tell me? I didn't know she was ill. Oh, I must go to her!"

"Now don't be foolish, Myee. Of course you can't go to her. She's asleep. Naturally she caught a very bad cold, and her temperature is up, as might be expected. But Dr. Blake has seen her, and is coming again early to-morrow morning. I am going to sleep in her room, and should have done so anyhow; so go to sleep in this nice room yourself, and forget all the rest. I will promise to come and tell you how she is the first thing in the morning."

When Mrs. Dent had gone, John's blackest hour descended upon her. She might defend her conduct in this or that particular, and think she was harshly treated in receiving such a punishment for it; but what stood out in her mind was that she had failed in her duty towards Jane. The very thing she had set her mind upon doing she hadn't done at all. Jane would have been better off here without her. How could she so have lost hold of the good inten-

tions with which she had come to school that now she was convicted of leading Jane into wrongdoing? No punishment could be too great for that.

Oh, why was she all alone, with nobody to whom she could pour out sorrow and repentance, no one who would forgive her and trust her to try again, and do better? She wept bitterly, and reached out in spirit to her mother, if only she could believe that she was near her, and still loved her as her child.

She grew a little calmer. Her mother was dead, and she would never see her again as long as she lived. She must guide her own life, and be brave in doing it; and she must try to make it what her mother would want it to be, and believe that all the time she was watching her, though there could be no response to her yearnings that would make her quite sure of it.

Presently her fears for Jane drove out other thoughts. The doctor had been called to see her, and was coming again early in the morning. She must be very ill. She must be much worse than Mrs. Dent had admitted. People like that always made the best of things, and thought they were easing your mind, when they were only frightening you.

She grew more and more frightened. Supposing Jane were to die! It would be through her fault. And they were keeping her from her. They were going to send her away. Jane might want her at any time. Surely she *would* want her!

Her thoughts became confused, but her fears increased to panic. She tried to open the door, forgetting for the moment that it was locked. The sensation of being imprisoned struck her like a physical blow. She ran to the bell, and pressed and pressed it, trying to make more noise by pushing it hard. Oh, would they never come!

It was Jessie, the maid whom the girls liked, who came to her at last. Her face was scared. "Whatever *is* the matter, Miss Myee?"

"I want to see Miss Parker. I *must* see Miss Parker. My sister is ill."

The open door showed release from that horrible feeling of imprisonment. "I must go to Miss Parker," she said, and pushed quickly by Jessie, who was taken by surprise, and could only follow her with expostulations, which she didn't hear, as she ran downstairs.

XXIV

MISS PARKER was alone in her room, writing. She was writing that letter to Lady Aubrey which would prepare the way for her getting rid of a girl who had given her nothing but trouble, and who had at last provided the much-desired opportunity herself.

And now here was the girl herself, bursting in upon her with unheard-of abruptness. John had undressed, according to order, while her terrors had been growing upon her. She had on her dressing-gown, but her hair was loose about her shoulders, and her face was white and her eyes wide with fear. Miss Parker received a shock, not entirely of annoyance, at the disrespectful intrusion.

"Oh, Miss Parker, *do* let me go to Jane. She's very ill, and she's sure to want me. I'm very sorry for what I've done wrong, really I am. I deserve to be sent away, but *don't* send me away till Jane is better, *please* don't. I'll do everything you tell me, if you'll let me stay, and see her sometimes."

The words, poured out almost incoherently, with hands clasped in appeal, ended in a burst of tears. Miss Parker was touched, perhaps in spite of herself, the grief and the fear were so genuine, even though the acknowledgement of error might be only inspired by them.

"Sit down," she said firmly, "and calm yourself. Listen to me. Your sister is not so ill as you imagine, and she is being well looked after. There is no reason for you to frighten yourself."

The words had some effect. John sank into the chair that was indicated to her, anxious now to do exactly what Miss Parker told her to do, and by all means to propitiate her. She kept her eyes on her as she sobbed: "But *don't* send me away till she's better. *Please* don't, Miss Parker. She does love me; and I love her, though I know I've set her a bad example. I won't do it any more, Miss Parker. I promise you I won't."

The childishness of the appeal struck an answering note. Miss Parker liked to play a maternal part towards her girls; but this one had given her so small an opportunity, meeting her attempts at kindness only with fresh offence, and denying to her the credit of

kind things that she was aware of having done. Resentment still worked in her, but the stirring of pity softened it. The first thing to do was to get rid of that look of fear, which no woman could see in the eyes of a child unmoved.

"Listen to me," she said again, "and try to stop crying, or you won't understand anything. You are alarming yourself unnecessarily about Jane. She has caught a bad cold, and her temperature is higher than it ought to be. But she is asleep now, which is a good sign, and the chances are that she will be much better to-morrow morning."

John had obediently gulped down her sobs. "But please don't send me away till she does get better," she said. "You won't, Miss Parker, will you?"

"No," said Miss Parker decisively, oblivious of the half-finished letter on her desk, and the railway time-table lying beside it.

She had gone farther than she had meant to, but did not regret it when John with a fresh burst of tears said: "Oh, thank you, Miss Parker. I'm so sorry I've been so naughty, but I never meant to be when I came here, and I wouldn't have been if I'd known you would be so kind."

She might have been twelve years old—younger than Jane—a child, with whom you could do anything. But Miss Parker had been able to do nothing with her hitherto. She had been more “difficult” than any girl she had ever had, and more than a match for her too.

“I have tried constantly to be kind to you,” she said, “but you have seemed bent upon making an enemy of me. It was because of that that I decided that there was nothing to do but to send you away. How can I keep girls in my school who defy me at every point, and won’t even allow me to show them friendship—girls who encourage others towards enmity with me too, for no reason? There was none of that before you came here, but now it has reached such a pitch that it is affecting the whole school. Why have you done it?”

John couldn’t remember for the moment why she had done it. It seemed a big thing for one new girl to have done in a little over a month; but if she *had* done it, no wonder Miss Parker was sending her away.

“I’m very very sorry,” she said, “and I’m very grateful to you, Miss Parker, for letting me stay till

Jane gets better. I don't know what I should have done if you had sent me away before then. It's my fault that she's ill."

Miss Parker was touched afresh. John wasn't pleading for a total remission of her sentence. She seemed to have forgotten herself, and to be thinking only of Jane.

"If I could trust you to be a good influence on your younger sister, instead of leading her into what is wrong!"

Again she had gone farther than she had intended. She wasn't ready to remit the sentence altogether, without thinking out the pros and cons at least as carefully as she believed she had thought them over before finally determining upon it. For she had not sat down to write to Lady Aubrey without further consideration, or the letter would already have been written and posted.

But John did not seize upon this sign of wavering purpose. "That is just what I said I would do before we came here," she said. "I promised my mother I would, before she died. And I haven't kept my promise. Oh, what shall I do?"

Another burst of tears, uncontrolled this time, as

the desolation of her loss came over her. Miss Parker gave way completely. "Come here, dear," she said.

John came to her, and she put her arm round her, and John clung to her and sobbed on her shoulder.



XXV

JOHN was moved up into the Second Form at half-term, and in spite of not liking Miss Prout as well as she liked Miss Wetherall, she managed to satisfy her that she was worth her place.

The Otter Club, at about the same time, decided that there was no great objection to having eleven members instead of ten, and Bridgit and John were elected together, Bridgit also having been moved up into the Second Form, rather to her surprise.

Miss Parker had had another little talk with her. She really ought to be ashamed of herself—a girl of her age, with plenty of brains, if she chose to use them—to sit down among girls three or four years younger than herself, and make no effort to rise in the school. She had not proved herself worth moving up, as Myee Aubrey, for instance had done, but she would *have* to work now, and Miss Parker would ask from time to time whether she was doing so, and should take a serious view of it if she heard that she was not.

"It's all very well," said Bridgit, recounting the conversation to John; "but she put me in the Third herself and said I wasn't to mind. Well, I didn't mind, and now she says I've got to. There's no satisfying the woman. But, thank goodness, the term's half over, and there are the holidays to look forward to. She's very wearing, and I shall be glad to get away from her."

"She's a jolly good sort," said John. "It was you who put me against her at first, and you were quite wrong about her. So was I. I'm never going to hear you say anything against Miss Parker, Lady Bridgit de Burgh, without sticking up for her; and I'm never going to say anything against her myself as long as I live."

"Oh, all right, John Aubrey Esquire. We know she's cut out the Wetherall girl with you. But do spare us the fatuous raptures. She's not really as beautiful as you think she is."

"It isn't like that at all," said John firmly. "I respect her, and I don't care whether she's got a long nose or a short nose, and anyhow you've got a snub nose yourself, and it's jealousy as much as anything."

"Yes, dear," said Bridgit soothingly. "Do go on."

John laughed. "You're a fool," she said amiably. "But I shall never forget that night when Jane was so ill, when she—"

"Was that the night when you and Jane forgot your bathing suits?" Bridgit interrupted her. "I heard something about that. The Vicar told me."

John laughed again, but blushed a little too. It was only Bridgit who ever mentioned that little lapse, the rest of the school averting their minds from it, as the Vicar had averted his eyes. "I can't think now why we did it," she said. "It wasn't any fun really, it was so cold. Oh, my goodness! What a fright I got about Jane! I say, Bridgit—if Jane had died should I have been a murderess?"

"Every time," said Bridgit encouragingly. "If it hadn't been for a beautiful girl, with a nose just the right length to catch a blob of mud on it, who risked everything to save you, you'd have had to stay out all night, and you'd have been hanged by this time."

Memory was too fresh for John to take it lightly. "I wormed it out of Mrs. Dent that they thought Jane had pneumonia," she said.

"Yes, you've told me, dear. But she hadn't. And

Parker—I beg your pardon, Miss Parker—took you in to see her, didn't she?"

"Yes. There's nothing to laugh at in that. I didn't know how much I loved Jane till then. Bridgit, do be sensible for a moment. Do you think I'm being what I ought to be to Jane now? It's the only thing I really care about."

"No, dear, I don't," said Bridgit. "But I'm getting tired of this conversation. Let's talk about the holidays, and you and Jane coming to Ireland."



THE END

